

A guidebook for planning, designing, promoting and conducting ecotourism activity programs



DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION WESTERN AUSTRALIA 2000



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WESTERN AUSTRALIA
2000

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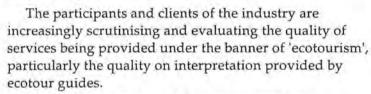
FOREWORD



In the past decade we have seen an upsurge in world interest in nature-based tourism. Conservation agencies, tourism commissions and tour operators have been busy planning, promoting and developing the range of facilities and services to accommodate the international demand for 'ecotourism'.

Ecotourism is "...nature-based tourism that involves interpretation and education, and is managed to be ecologically sustainable (recognising that the 'natural environment' includes cultural components and that 'ecologically sustainable' involves an appropriate return to the community and the long-term conservation of the resource). (Commonwealth Department of Tourism)

Key components of nature tourism are interaction with, interpretation of and care and support for our heritage – the things we value about our natural environment, our history and our culture. Visitors to natural areas and heritage sites are now looking for a guide to enhance the experience through interpretation which is described as – "...ways to communicate ideas and feelings which enrich people's understanding and appreciation of their world and their role within it". (Interpretation Australia Association)



Developing Ecotours and Other Interpretive Activity Programs and Best Recipes for Interpreting Our Heritage:

Activities for Ecotour Guides and Others are tools designed to help ecotour and nature-based tour operators and guides deliver quality interpretive activities that are ecologically sustainable, economically viable and appropriate socioculturally.

Dr. Wally Cox
Executive Director
Department of Conservation, Western Australia

FOREWORD

Ecotourism is booming. For some years now it has been recognised as the fastest growing sector of the world's largest industry.

Australia is seen as a land of great opportunity for both the ecotourist and the ecotourism operator alike. Throughout the world, it has a reputation as a clean, safe holiday destination resplendent with natural beauty. Spectacular coral reefs, majestic forests, mountains, the outback, a fauna unlike anywhere else in the world and, of course, the world's oldest surviving culture, that of the indigenous Australians – all are among the precious jewels in our ecotourism crown.

With the continuing growth of the industry, protection of this reputation and our natural assets is crucial to our individual and collective success. We must ensure that quality products and experiences are features of Australian ecotourism. This book will play an important role in providing that guarantee, by helping to introduce prospective operators to the business of ecotourism. It is the first comprehensive 'how to' guide for entry into the ecotourism industry, addressing issues of business planning and development, marketing and the development of quality ecotourism product. Where appropriate the reader is directed towards the relevant government departments for information and assistance. In doing this, the book sets the agenda for small businesses to consider in order to give themselves the best chance at survival in an increasingly competitive market place with increasingly discerning clients.

The strongest focus of the book, however, is the ecotourism product and how to develop it into a very personal natural experience. Absolutely crucial to this is the interpretation of the natural and cultural values presented within an ecotour. Despite its importance, the concept of interpretation is often misunderstood, to the detriment of both the business and its clients. For many years the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) has exhibited leadership and expertise in interpretation and thus there would be few more qualified to guide the newcomer through the development of interpretive programs.

I strongly recommend this book to anyone starting business in the ecotourism industry, and would also advise you to strongly consider the National Ecotourism Accreditation Program. Together these documents can provide a most auspicious beginning to any budding ecotourism venture.

Furthermore I would like to extend an invitation to you to join the Ecotourism Association of Australia, through which I hope you will find the information and networking contacts to ensure your new venture stays at the cutting edge of Australia's most vibrant and rewarding industry.



Peter O'Reilly President, Ecotourism Association of Australia

PREFACE

The Department of Conservation in Western Australia is the government agency responsible for managing the State's forests and reserves as well as for conserving native plants and animals and their sustainable use.

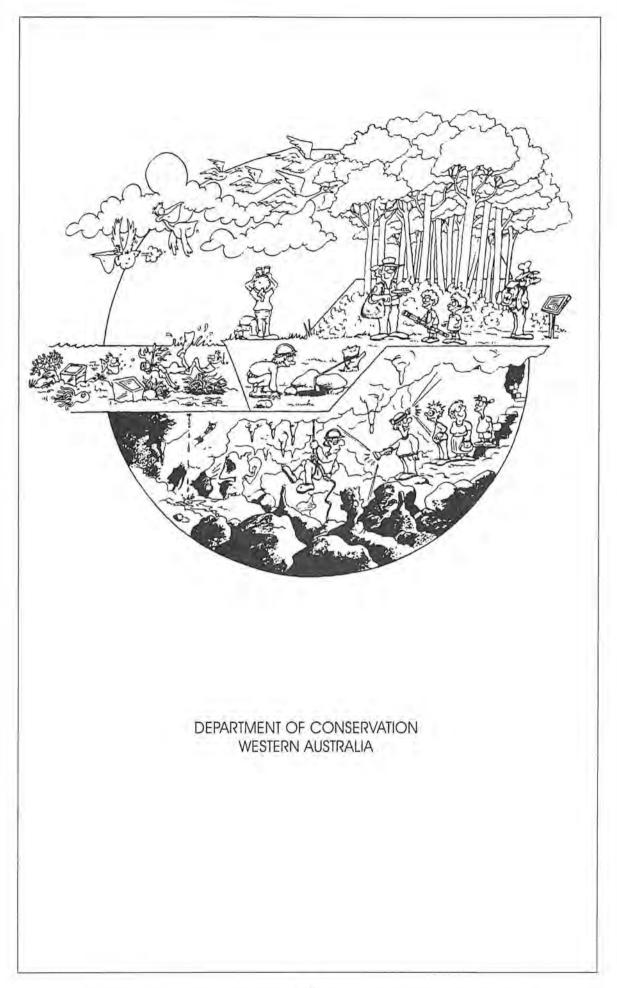
The Department of Conservation is directly involved with many activities which affect ecotour operators and guides. These include:

- issuing licences and leases to operators to conduct commercial activities in some of the most spectacular environments in Australia;
- conducting training in the design of interpretive activities, programs and ecotours for natural and cultural areas;
- contributing to natural area promotional activities;
- developing interpretive facilities, products and services;
- developing guidelines for ecotour operators and guides;
- developing standards for tour guiding;
- delivering presentations on behalf of tour operators; and
- providing advice and consultation on matters relating to nature-based tourism.

It is from this background that the Visitor Interpretation Services Section of The Department of Conservation has largely drawn the information in this publication. The intent is to provide tour operators and others from around Australia with a guide to planning, designing, promoting and conducting ecotourism activity programs.

The chief focus is on the interpretive component of ecotourism – the most dynamic but the least understood aspect of running an ecotour business. It is for those energetic individuals who bring together a passionate interest in heritage and environment, a particular earth-friendly value set and a desire to earn an income in the area of their primary interest that this guidebook is written.

The authors are grateful for the useful advice and assistance provided by Rod Annear, Southern Forest Region; Kate Baxter, Marketing and Promotions Officer, The Hills Forest; Rod Hillman, Manager, Yanchep National Park; Karen Shaddock, Sign Design Studio – all of the Department of Conservation; Peter O'Reilly, O'Reillys Guest House, Queensland and President of the Ecotourism Association Australia; Ross Dowling, Edith Cowan University; Ian Menzies, Australian Wilderness Adventures; Betty Weiler, Monash University; Alice Crabtree, Ecotour Guide Training Consultant; Steve Crawford, Nature-Based Tourism, Western Australian Tourism Commission, and others.



INTRODUCTION

Tourism is big business worldwide and ecotourism is the current trendsetter within this broad spectrum industry that covers everything from travel to accommodation to tour experiences.

As the fastest growing niche market in the Australian tourism sector, ecotourism provides the most sought after experiences by both domestic and international visitors. Ecotourism is nature-based tourism that involves interpretation and education and is managed to be ecologically sustainable.¹

An ecotour is a program of interpretive activities usually including travel and often an overnight stay. On an ecotour that lasts half a day or longer clients participate in all the activities rather than selecting activities out of a program offered at a resort, theme park, camping area or national park.

Conducting ecotours provides a special opportunity for sharing knowledge, feelings and ideas through unusual, and often unique, experiences in natural and cultural areas.

Ecotours can:

- Add value to a tourism business.
- ▶ Meet market expectation for interpretation of an area or attraction.
- Promote a natural or cultural area
- Enrich client experiences within a natural or cultural area.
- Minimise impact of visitors on a natural and cultural area.
- Generate funds for protection of a significant feature.
- Provide income and employment in regional economies.
- Develop community awareness of sustainable environmental management.

A key element of ecotourism is *interpretation* – a means of communicating ideas and feelings which enriches people's understanding and appreciation of their world and their role within it.²

^{1.} Commonwealth Department of Tourism, 1994

^{2:} Interpretation Australia Association, 1994

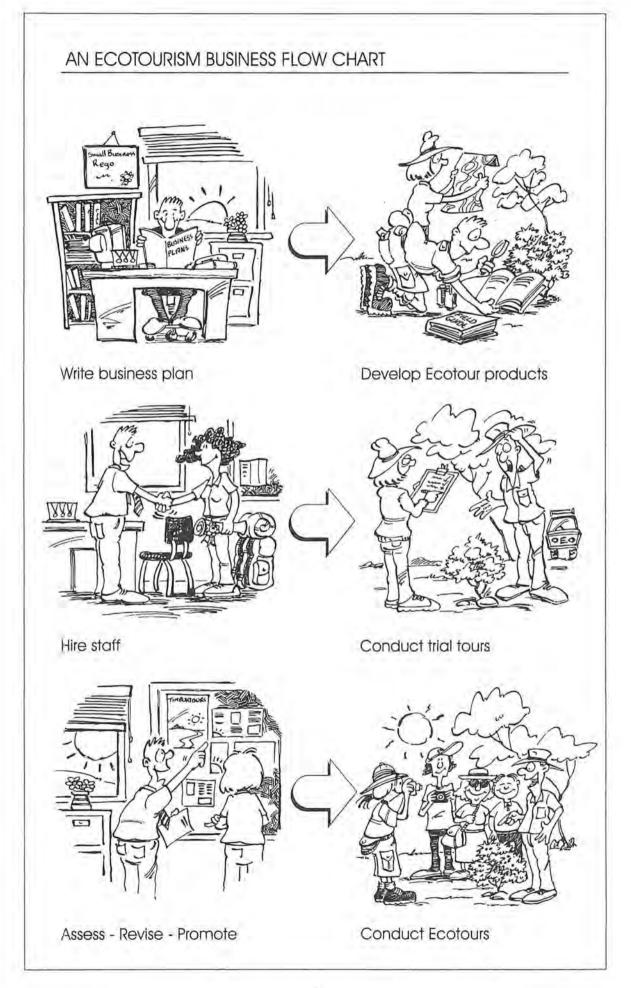
At the Australian Ecotourism Association's national conference in 1997, interpretation was identified as one of the pivotal issues facing the development of ecotourism in the new millennium.

This guidebook is written for new as well as experienced Australian ecotour operators and guides who wish to improve the quality of interpretation in their business and to develop or expand an ecotour program. However, a sound interpretive product must be supported by sound business planning for a successful ecotour operation.

This guidebook will help you to:

- design an ecotour with sound interpretive content, themes and techniques;
- appreciate the requirements for building an ecotour business;
- identify statutory obligations for conducting ecotours;
- understand the interpretive requirements for developing and conducting a successful ecotour;
- be familiar with the business planning necessary for ecotours;
- know how to best promote ecotours;
- use client feedback for business improvement; and
- know where to find out about techniques for sustainable ecotours (minimising impact; conserving resources; contributing to local community).

A glossary of ecotourism terminology as used in this guidebook is provided at the end of the book.



ABOUT BUSINESS PLANNING

Before launching yourself into the ecotourism marketplace, you need to know what to expect in this dynamic industry and what you will need to do to be successful. For starters, operating an ecotourism business requires a good understanding of:

- the ecotourism industry;
- market trends and key events;
- government regulations, taxes and legal requirements that will impact on the business; and
- basic accounting and marketing concepts.3

There are also several other issues to consider in the lead up to business planning:

- personal suitability for running an ecotourism operation;
- relevant business and ecotourism experience, training and professional development;
- location and staffing requirements;
- equipment required;
- knowledge of one's personal financial position;
- financial skills and knowledge required; and
- consideration of your target client group.4

Despite the very best ideas, enthusiasm and intent, in the end, ecotours must pay their way. A completed business plan is a summary and evaluation of your business idea. A business plan allows an honest appraisal of the business potential of the ecotour operation you wish to run, be it small or large. The business plan allows you to give the business a 'dry run' where you can assess the viability of the operation before you sink your life savings into it. The business plan also allows you to explore different methods of operating your ecotours by running financial models of the various methods and ascertaining the method best for you. The success of your business is likely to be closely linked to the thoroughness of your planning.6

Basically, a business plan has three major components - marketing, operational and financial components (see Table 1).

Commonwealth Office of National Tourism, Tourism Facts No. 13, May 1997
 Commonwealth Office of National Tourism, Tourism Facts No. 13, May 1997

^{5.} Small Business Development Corporation, WA, 1997

Commonwealth Office of National Tourism, Tourism Facts No. 13, May 1997

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	Responsibility
ì	Monitoring
	Monitoring
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D.1 Financial Statements	
D.1 Financial Statements	D.1.1 Profit and Loss Statemen D.1.2 Balance Sheet D.1.3 Statement of Cash Flows
D.1 Financial Statements	D.1.1 Profit and Loss Statemen D.1.2 Balance Sheet
	A.2 Mission Statement A.3 Objectives A.4 Situation Analysis A.5 SWOT Analysis B.1 Marketing Objectives B.2 Product Position B.3 Marketing Mix B.4 Marketing Action Plans C.1 Human Resources C.2 Facilities and Services C.3 Organisational Structure, Management and Administration C.4 Risk Management and Safety C.5 Quality Control

With a sound business plan in hand, you may begin to focus on the ecotours themselves.

For assistance in starting a business in ecotourism, check with the relevant State and Territory government organisations listed below.

■ Australian Capital Territory

Department of Communication Information Technology and the Arts PO Box 1000 Civic Square Canberra,

ACT 2608 Ph: 02 6271 1901 Fax: 02 6271 1000

Internet: www.dcita.gov.au

Office of Small Business Department of Industry, Science and Resources

GPO 9839

Canberra, ACT 2601 Ph: 02 6213 6000

Internet: www.isr.gov.au

■ South Australia

The Business Centre GPO Box 1565 Adelaide, SA 5001 Ph: 08 8463 3800 Fax: 08 8231 1199

Internet: www.tbc.sa.gov.au

Tasmania

Department of State Development GPO Box 646 Hobart, TAS 7001

Hobart, TAS 7001 Ph: 03 6233 5888 Fax: 03 6233 5800

Internet: www.tdr.tas.gov.au

Department of State Development

PO Box 1186 Launceston, TAS 7250 Ph: 03 6336 2501

Fax: 03 6334 1131

Internet: www.tdr.tas.gov.au

New South Wales

State and Regional Development NSW PO Box N818

Grosvenor Place Sydney, NSW 1220 Ph: 02 9338 6705 Fax: 02 9228 3111

Internet: www.business.nsw.gov.au

Northern Territory

Department of Industries and Business GPO Box 4160 Darwin, NT 0801 Phy 08 8999 7916

Ph: 08 8999 7916 Fax: 08 8999 7924

Internet: www.nt.gov.au/daiti/

■ Victoria

Small Business Victoria Level 5, 55 Collins St Melbourne, VIC 3000

Ph: 132215 Fax: 03 9651 9725

Internet: www.sbv.bic.gov.au

Queensland

Department of State Development

Office of Small Business

GPO Box 402 Brisbane, QLD 4001 Ph: 1800 061 631 Fax: 07 3234 0024

Internet:

www.statedevelopment.qld.gov.au

Western Australia

Small Business Development

Corporation GPO Box C111 Perth, WA 6001 Ph: 08 9220 0222 Fax: 08 9325 3981

Internet: www.sbdc.com.au

FURTHER READING

McKercher, B. (1998) Hospitality Press: Melbourne.

PROFESSIONAL APPROACH

There are over 600 ecotour operators in Australia with an estimated turnover of more than \$250 million. The ecotourism industry is characterised by small businesses offering personalised services. Approximately 85 per cent of ecotourism operators employ fewer than 20 staff.⁷

Typically, ecotour operators and guides are resourceful with a wide range of skills and training such as first aid, interpretive guiding, some knowledge of foreign languages, a bus driving licence, off-road driving ability, vehicle maintenance skills, map and compass reading and so forth.

Professional ecotour outfits also incorporate a customer service ethic into their business, obtain the appropriate permits and licences and secure public liability insurance. They may also seek national ecotour accreditation and guide certification.

CUSTOMER FOCUS

The relationship between the ecotour operator and clients is paramount. Efficient and friendly first-point-of-contact with your potential clients is essential. In fact, staff interactions with clients before, during and after an activity create impressions and build expectations which will affect your business beneficially or otherwise.

Research shows that a typical business loses 68 per cent of its customers through indifferent attitudes and poor service provided by staff and management. By comparison, only 9 per cent are lost through price. Moreover, for every customer who protests there are a further 26 dissatisfied customers who don't complain to the business but tell up to 20 other people of their experience.⁸

The advice "If you aren't happy with our service, tell us. If you are happy, tell everyone else!" can be very useful if acted upon. Your unhappy customers can tell you more about your business than the happy ones. Treating potential clients and actual clients with appropriate enthusiasm and respect should be a top priority. There is nothing more satisfying than the free 'word of mouth' promotion you receive from happy clients.

^{7.} Commonwealth Office of National Tourism. Tourism Facts No. 16, May 1997

^{8.} How to Build your Business through Better Service, AussleHost flyer, 1998



You can make a big impact on your business by hiring staff who have a positive attitude, people who are enthusiastic to work in your business, pleasant to be around and who show genuine interest in customers. Don't underestimate what can be learned, and learned quickly, by someone who, although inexperienced, has these personality traits. A great way for this to happen is to carefully match the task to the staff member so that they are doing what they have the skills to perform and the desire to do it.

No matter who your staff are, it pays to refresh them every so often with some type of customer service training - whether it be at a staff meeting to develop or revise a customer service code of practice for your business or a professional training seminar. It is possible to hire a consulting firm to develop a program specifically tailored to your business or choose a program generally applicable to any business such as the AussieHost Workshops. AussieHost is nationally accredited by the Vocation Accreditation Board (VETAB). They can be contacted at:



Australia's Symbol of Quality Service

AussieHost Level 2, 80 William St. Woolloomooloo, NSW 2011

Ph: 02 9332 3416 Fax: 02 9332 3383

Email: national@aussiehost.com.au

CODES OF PRACTICE AND ETHICS

Ethical business practice also impacts on the quality of customer service offered. Working with your staff to tailor a set of principles specifically for your business can be a valuable exercise in team building and customer focus. Produce copies and distribute them to all staff. Place a copy where customers can see it, too. Revisit the principles as a group for fine-tuning on a regular basis. Principles and codes of practice gathered from professional agencies involved with ecotourism have been produced by various sectors of the industry. These should assist you to write a set for your own business.

The following basic interpretive principles are generally agreed upon by interpretive specialists.

- ▶ Maximise the quality of the interpretive experience for the audience.
- ▶ Appeal to all the senses.
- Acknowledge the importance of respect for culture when interpreting cultural heritage.
- Strive to improve interpretive skills and knowledge through appropriate training and education.
- Only disseminate information known to be accurate and not misleading.
- Provide the audience with a variety of stimuli such as visual, auditory, hands-on and minds-on activities.
- Ensure the audience is given the opportunity to participate in some aspect of the interpretation.
- Relate the interpretation to something that is within the experience of the audience.
- Provide and maintain a theme throughout the interpretive presentation.

Further information about interpretation may be obtained through:



Interpretation Australia Association Secretary PO Box 1231 Collingwood, VIC 3066 www.vicnet.net.au/~interpoz

The Inbound Tour Operators Association's Code of Ethics states that accredited ITOA Guides will:

- Strive to upgrade their guiding knowledge and guiding skills.
- At all times support the spirit, purpose and goals of the Guide Qualification Programme.
- Ensure their responsibility to their client is given the highest priority.
- Make every effort to honour all commitments, written and verbal.
- Protect the interest of their employer wherever possible.
- Only disseminate information known to be honest, accurate and not misleading.
- Adhere to the Tourism Council of Australia's Code of Sustainable Tourism.



The following list is based on the Tourism Council of Australia's 1998 Code of Sustainable Tourism Statement of Principles:

- Use resources sustainably.
- Reduce over-consumption and waste.
- Maintain and promote natural, social and cultural diversity.
- Integrate tourism development into national, state and local strategic planning.
- Support local economies.
- Involve local and indigenous cultures.
- Consult stakeholders and the public.
- Train staff.
- Market tourism responsibly.
- Undertake research.



The Ecotourism Association of Australia has adopted the following Code of Practice for Ecotourism Operators:

- Strengthen the conservation effort for, and enhance the natural integrity of, the places visited.
- Respect the sensitivities of other cultures.
- Be efficient in the use of natural resources (water, energy).
- Ensure waste disposal has minimal environmental and aesthetic impacts.
- Develop a recycling program.

- Support principals (for example, accommodation houses, suppliers, carriers) who have a conservation ethic.
- Keep abreast of current political and environmental issues, particularly of the local area.
- Network with other stakeholders (particularly those in the local area) to keep each other informed of developments and to encourage the use of this Code of Practice.
- Endeavour to use distribution networks (for example, catalogues) and retail outlets to raise environmental awareness by distributing guidelines to customers.
- Support ecotourism education and training for guides and managers.
- Employ tour guides well versed and respectful of local cultures and environments.
- Give clients appropriate verbal and written educational material (interpretation) and guidance with respect to the natural and cultural history of the areas visited.
- Use locally produced goods that benefit the local community, but do not buy goods made from threatened or endangered species.
- Never intentionally disturb or encourage the disturbance of wildlife or wildlife habitats.
- Keep vehicles to designated roads and trails.
- Abide by the rules and regulations applying in natural areas.
- Commit to the principle of best practice.
- Comply with Australian safety standards.
- Ensure truth in advertising.
- Maximise the quality of experience for hosts and guests.



ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Being involved in ecotourism requires a multifaceted approach and broad based skills. While this guidebook focuses primarily on ways of interpreting environmental processes and features for ecotourists, there is much more to conducting a genuine ecotourism operation. It's not only about what ecotourism operators say but about what they do as well – 'walking the talk' so to speak. This demands a strategy to minimise the use of energy, water and materials as well as minimising our physical and social impact on the natural and cultural environment we visit and reside within.

This also means taking practical action in such things as establishing a recycling system, keeping informed on ways of lessening our impact on the environment, putting them into practice and contributing in appropriate ways to local communities. Below are some relevant readings and web pages.

Readings on Environmental Management

Office of National Tourism (1997) Best Practice Ecotourism: A Guide to Energy and Waste Minimisation. Canberra.

Fuji Xerox (1997) Down-to-earth office care: a practical guide to environmental action in the office. (available direct from Fuji Xerox).

Energy Victoria (1996) Energy Efficient Housing Manual: Design Guidelines and Case Studies. Melbourne.

Tourism Council Australia (1998) Being Green Keeps You Out of the Red. Woolloomooloo, NSW.

Web Sites on Environmental Management

Tourism Accommodation and the Environment: A Resource Directory for Low **Environmental Impact Tourism Accommodation** http://www.tourism.gov.au/accommdir/

Office of National Tourism: Provides a range of information about ecotourism http://www.tourism.gov.au

Environment Management Industry Association of Australia: Peak body representing environment management industry which aims to establish national and international networks to link Australia with environmental challenges and solutions. http://www.emiaa.org.au

PERMITS AND LICENCES

The permits and licences you will require depend on where you intend to hold your ecotour, how you wish to travel and what activities you plan to pursue. For a comprehensive list of potential requirements, contact the business development service for each State and Territory in which you plan to operate (see p 6 in Section 1).

Table 2 is a list of some of the permits and licences you may require as an ecotour operator.

INSURANCE

Public Liability Insurance (PLI) protects ecotour operators from claims of negligence made against them by clients. It covers the operators' legal liability to their clients for damage to property or bodily injury. For instance, if you take a group of clients out caving and one of them gets lost, accidentally drops and smashes their torch and digital camera and then breaks a leg whilst groping about in the dark, this client may decide to hold you negligent, in which case PLI will cover you.

Ecotour operators may purchase PLI through inbound tour operator associations or directly from an insurance company or through a broker. The tour operator associations work with brokers who may be able to organise special rates for groups. Be aware that to obtain licences to conduct commercial activities in parks and reserves you will be required to prove that you hold PLI which must be taken out and held in force for the duration of the licence period.

Costs for PLI vary depending on the State or Territory in which it is purchased. It is possible to join an out-of-State association where the insurance rates may be less costly and it is worth checking around before buying. It is recommended that operators carry a limit of indemnity of at least \$10 million.

	***	-		* *
Table 2.	Possible.	Ecotourism	Permits and	Licences

Permits and Licences*	Cost and Fees*
Transit and Entry Permits (Aboriginal Reserves)	No cost
Permit to Travel along State Barrier Fence (vermin fence)	No cost
Commercial Tourist Activity Licence	\$50 application fee; \$250 licence charge
Permit to Conduct Commercial Tours in National Parks	Variable depending on statutory body
Permit to Conduct Commercial Activities location in Commonwealth National Parks	Variable according to activity and
Licence for Public Performance or Protected Sound Recordings	Variable according to use of licence
Music Licences for Public Performance, usage Broadcast for Official Title	Variable depending on type of music
Licence for Public Exhibition of Music Video Clips	Variable according to use of licence
National Coaching Accreditation Scheme	\$10, plus course fees
Sound Recording Reproduction Licence Agreement	Variable according to use of licence
Omnibus Licence and Permit/Temporary Licence	\$4.25 per passenger seat per annum; permit \$10 per journey
Approval for Temporary Caravan Park/Camp Ground	No fee
Business Name Registration	\$90 for the first 3-year registration period renewal \$75
Travel Agents Licence Person	3-year licence and renewal: Natural and Firm, \$666 3-year licence and renewal: Body Corporate, \$1000 for each additional premises (Maximum \$1440)

^{*} These examples are based on 1998 fees for Western Australia only,

However, the annual premium paid will vary depending on the riskiness of the activities undertaken. For example, a guide taking clients on birdwalks through the rainforest might pay a \$300 minimum premium whereas someone taking visitors abseiling could expect a premium of several thousand dollars or more.

When you come to fill out forms for PLI, you will see that an insurance company wants to know what steps you have in place to help keep your clients safe and aware of any potential risks. You may wish to state on your promotional materials that while you will take all care, safety is the responsibility of the client. To participate in some activities you may also ask clients to fill in an indemnity form. You will need to work with a broker or insurance company to determine what specific coverage best suits your type and scale of ecotourism.

You should also acquire insurance of your product. This can cover you from misrepresentation in advertising and practice. For example, if you cannot gain access to the falls because of floods or your campfire meal induces food poisoning, you could be sued for not delivering your advertised product.

ACCREDITATION FOR ECOTOURS

Australian ecotour operators are steadily gaining in their skills and knowledge about their craft. In Australia, the National Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP) is helping define the standards for ecotourism products.

NEAP is based on eight key principles, four of which refer to interpretation:

- Ecotourism focuses on personally experiencing natural areas in ways that lead to greater understanding and appreciation.
- Ecotourism integrates opportunities to understand natural areas into each experience.
- Ecotourism is sensitive to, interprets and involves different cultures, particularly indigenous culture.
- Ecotourism positively contributes to the conservation of natural areas.

The other four key principles are:

- Ecotourism represents best practice for ecologically sustainable tourism.
- Ecotourism provides constructive ongoing contributions to local communities.
- Ecotourism consistently meets client expectations.
- Ecotourism marketing is accurate and leads to realistic expectations.

Three types of ecotourism product can be accredited: tours, accommodation and attractions. Information on NEAP may be obtained from:



Ecotourism Association of Australia **Executive Officer** Level 7, 97 Creek Street (GPO Box 268) Brisbane, QLD 4001 Ph: 07 3229 5550

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The Tourism Council Australia's National Tourism Accreditation Programme involves registration of commitment to customer service and quality assurance. Further information may be obtained from:



Tourism Council Australia
National Tourism Accreditation Programme
PO Box 91
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LANNING AN ECOTOUR PROGRAM

An ecotour is a program of interpretive activities that are integrated into a well planned series of interpretive experiences. An ecotour should be planned as part of the overall tourism opportunities available within a region. It pays to know what else is on the market for clients and to provide something that is complementary, offers a different angle or is a better overall product.

PROGRAM PLANNING

In planning an ecotour or interpretive activities program, there are some key components to consider.

Crucial to quality programming is the ability to set the program's aims and objectives, and to choose interpretive activities appropriate to your audience and the sites you visit and that help impart your environmental themes and messages. In subsequent sections we will consider these key components.

Why

An aim is a general guiding statement to point the program in the right direction. For example:

- Provide opportunities for enriching client experiences of the Australian bush that are ecologically sustainable and economically viable for business.
- Provide enjoyable and different experiences of Perth's contemporary culture.

Objectives are more specific. They are the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and actions you want your tour or program participants to achieve. You need to document your objectives so that you can later evaluate the success of your ecotour, that is, whether you achieved your objectives. For example:

- Develop clients who are able to look after themselves and others in bush environments.
- Develop clients who understand basic ecological concepts within the context of the local environment.
- Raise client awareness and appreciation for the beauty and diversity of local plants.
- Provide exciting, unusual programs which highlight Aboriginal culture and minimise cultural impact.
- Provide hands-on experiences of maritime skills.
- Provide insights into current environmental research.
- Provide skill-developing adventures in caving.

PLANNING AN ECOTO	OUR PROGRAM OF INTERPRETIVE ACTIVITIES
	WHY?
AIM	OBJECTIVES/INPUTS
	WHAT?
	WITATE
PERFORM	MANCE INDICATORS/OUTCOMES
	ANALYSIS
AUDIENCE	SITES STORIES
Ţ	TOPICS THEMES/MESSAGES
	HOWA
	HOW?
ACT	TIVITY DESIGN TECHNIQUES
	WHERE?
ROUTE/SEQUENC	E OF ACTIVITIES/PACING/PRESENTATION
	WHEN?
TIMING (SEA	ASON/TIMES OF DAY/NIGHT/MEALS)
OPERATION	PROMOTION ACCOUNTING
PRESENTA	ATION

What

Ecotour Program performance indicators are simple, measurable statements which serve as criteria for determining the success or otherwise of your ecotour program. They are the outcomes that result from your tour guiding objectives. For example:

- An average of 10 clients will attend each ecotour.
- All clients will view at least one endangered species relocation site.
- ▶ All interpretive activities will have written themes and objectives which are supported by the guides and clearly communicated to clients.

Once you have established your intent and how you will measure your success, it is time to get down to analysing your potential clients (your target audience), the region, area and/or sites you intend to visit and the topics of the stories you wish to explore. Ultimately your topics will need to be refined into a number of specific themes or messages that you want to convey to your clients. This is the essence of experience enrichment. More about that in Section 5: Establishing Ecotour Themes.

How

From the analysis of audience, sites and stories a synthesis is developed that produces a variety of potential interpretive activities. Good sound interpretive design is essential to producing an ecotour activity. However, you must also be a bit of a performer to add that touch of magic. You can't underestimate the human element - the role of the guide as leader. A good presenter with poor interpretive design may be entertaining but it is not an ecotour.

Section 6 details the suite of activity design techniques. It is preferable to select from a range of interpretive activities to make the program diverse and appealing to a wide audience. Ensure the program includes activities for passive and active involvement. Consider different age groups, skill levels and interests. Give clients a wide variety of ways to experience the interpretive themes of your ecotour or activities program.

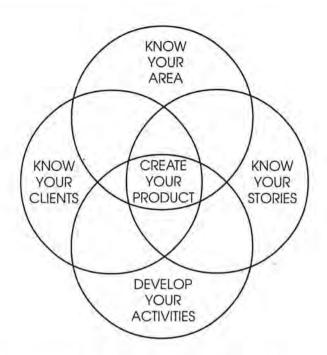
Where and When

Once you have a collection of well designed interpretive activities at established sites, then it is a matter of choreographing the ecotour - timing the sequence of activities so the ecotour has a satisfying mix of tension and release, suspense and expectation, action and relaxation. Some of this planning is dependent on the season and the expected weather conditions, some on the time of day or night, but also on the nature and capabilities of your clients and the guide.

Your means of movement (walk, drive, ride, boat, fly) and your route provide a defining context and sequence for your tour and your activities.

When your tour program of activities and timetable are established, it is time to consider the business of operating - promoting, staffing, ticketing, accounting, presentation and evaluation. These are considered in Sections 7, 8 and 9.

An ecotour product is a commercial tourism activity which involves interpretation and education, and is managed to be ecologically sustainable. The quality of an ecotour product is closely linked to the quality of the interpretation



presented by operators and guides. The extent of a guide's interpretive skills will directly affect the audience's experience.9

A genuine ecotour is interpretive. It encourages interaction, reveals meanings and enhances appreciation. Driving or walking through an area with a guide who just talks is not interpretation. Nor is it ecotourism. It is merely 'gawk 'n talk'.

To interpret a natural system or cultural precinct well, ecotour guides need to know their clients, research their story topics and design appropriate activities for the area or site and the tour participants.

KNOWING YOUR CLIENTS

Before developing the product (the ecotour or interpretive activities program), establish who the target audience is and what sort of experiences they might seek. You need to consider current products in the marketplace and the sorts of experiences other ecotour operators already provide.

The term 'marketing' refers to both i) researching your market to learn who your potential customers are and determining what sort of ecotours they want, and ii) reaching your potential customers through a strategy of promotion to ensure they know about your ecotours.10

Current trends in marketing are to analyse your clients and discover their needs, then supply those needs in the way they want, thus providing customer satisfaction.

Consider your market niche carefully. Consulting ecotourism clients directly is a good way to get ideas. Encourage and record feedback from clients so that you can build up a database of ideas. Conducting 'focus groups' can also help direct ecotour development. This involves inviting clients and potential clients together for brainstorming sessions about what sorts of ecotour opportunities they desire.

Nature Based Tourism Strategy for WA, Report, 1997
 Tourism Marketing Guide, WATC, June 1998, p. 14

Your business plan will have shown you what your competitors are doing, how they deliver the product, their pricing and marketing strategies. This information will help direct you to opportunities and target niche markets.

Traditional quantitative research such as sampling and surveys can also help you gather ideas. Depending on the size of your operation, you may want to engage a reputable market research firm to help ensure good design of a market research program and possibly assist with modeling the impact of various ecotourism products on particular markets.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics obtains and publishes information on visitor numbers to accommodation facilities which is updated quarterly. Most of their publications may be purchased for around \$15 from regional offices in Australian capital cities.

The Bureau of Tourism Research (BTR) publishes an occasional paper on the 'Profiles and Motivations of Nature-based Tourists Visiting Australia'. Copies are available from BTR. Ph 02 6213 6967. Fax 02 6213 6983.

Park and reserve managers keep statistics on the numbers of visitors and their chosen activities. They also keep current information on the number and type of commercial tour operators using the reserves. Contact your relevant authority for details.

You might decide to offer a range of ecotour options to cover existing demand while trialing the potential of a new product. Talk with your local, State and Federal tourism commissions and professional associations to determine what sorts of products are, or may be, sought by your potential audience.

In considering your audience you must often strike a balance between a concentrated focus and wide audience appeal. Targeting a wide audience provides a broader potential income base but can lack focus on the essence of ecotourism - the interpretation of the tour activities and experiences.

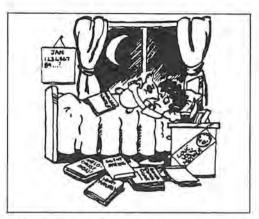
Considering the audience and the product is what determines and nurtures a 'competitive advantage' – that something special which separates your product from all the others. This is the key to your marketing strategy and how you will develop your reputation as an ecotour provider. Your advantage can be a unique product, access to a special place, control of a niche market, superior facilities or services or a competitive price.11 Ensure your competitive advantage works for you and that it is an area in which you are comfortable and not something that will limit your potential market and force you into an ever decreasing client base.

No matter what ecotour you decide to develop, you have to consider the receiver of your information. To be effective, communication must be relevant to the lifestyle, language and understanding of your clients. You need to adapt your topic, content, message and technique to your clients and the sites your ecotour visits.

One way of considering which markets you will focus on is to draw up characterisations which will help you keep track of those to whom you wish to appeal, now and possibly in the future. The following light hearted examples were used by the Visitor Interpretation Services section of CALM to consider the interests of various segments of the market.

Section 6 looks at designing ecotour experiences to appeal to all your clients by considering how our minds are stimulated and our preferences for processing information and experiences.

^{11.} Tourism Marketing Guide, WATC, June 1998, p. 16



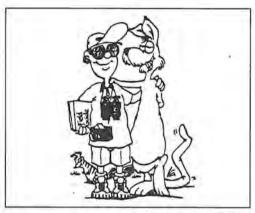
Itchy Feeters: Adventurous, outdoorsy types looking for physical and mental challenges in natural areas



Ponderers: Kept awake at night thinking about the loss of biodiversity in Australia and the rest of the world; enjoy making contributions to worthwhile research projects and participating in voluntary natural science research



Young Endeavours: Twenty-somethings, enjoy gardening, camping and interested in quiet, individual bushwalks



Jet-abouts: Overseas visitors looking for authentic natural and cultural experiences with unusual photo opportunities and the chance to participate in Australian activities



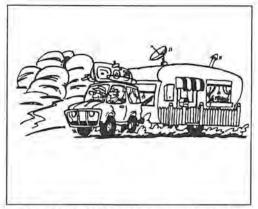
Energy Maximisers: Under ten years old, looking forward to being 'set free' during school holidays; enjoy looking for (and finding) spiders, scorpions, exploring caves and running fast



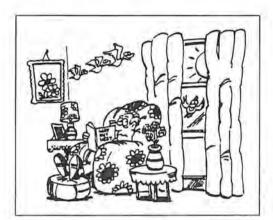
New-Age Thoughtfuls: Engaged in several jobs and studying full time; interested in environmental activities which benefit conservation efforts



Green Chalkies: Teachers keen to involve classes with novel and meaningful approaches to environmental education



Vintage Voyagers: Refired couples towing 'you beaut' caravans, visiting all the best natural areas of Australia



Armchair Venturers: City dwellers generally suspicious of natural areas but considering a move beyond roses, gerberas and hibiscus in urban gardening



Mad Rappers: Young people Interested in hanging out with friends, the latest gossip and maximum impact on all environments

ONSIDERING THE CONTENT

INTERPRETING YOUR STORY TOPICS



Ecotourism is nature-based tourism that involves interpretation and education and is managed to be ecologically sustainable. The substance of an ecotour is the natural resource, often an area of heritage value. Heritage comprises the things we value and want to keep as a community and as a culture. The concept of heritage can be applied to natural and cultural environments. Cultural environments include built components as well as the value we put on land and seascapes.

Cultural expression is an assessment of the totality of a community's means of expression: arts, crafts, activities, language and lifestyles. It is both contemporary and ongoing. It may also be traditional when it is accepted and re-affirmed over time. Cultural expressions become part of our heritage when they have stood the test of time and continue to be valued by the contemporary community. Broad cultural and natural concepts may be broken down into possible topics for interpretation and from there into specific themes. These are ultimately applied to the sites where people can experience them (see Sections 4 and 5).

SETTING THE SCENE

Anyone proposing an ecotour in the Australian outdoor environment, be it the coast, bushland, wetlands, National Parks and State Forests, zoo, private wildlife sanctuaries, parks and gardens and other lands or waters, will need a firm grasp of ecological processes.

Ecology involves concepts and processes which work together to form life as we know it on earth. The Institute of Earth Education has effectively condensed the complexity of life into seven key concepts. They are energy flow, cycles, diversity, community, interrelationships, change and adaptation. The following description is quoted from Sunship Earth: An Acclimitization Program for Outdoor Learning by Steve Van Matre.

Energy Flow: It starts with sunlight energy which is transferred in decreasing amounts from the growing things that can capture it (plants – food producers) to those which cannot (animals – food consumers) to those which obtain in from the dying of others (certain plants and animals – food decomposers).

Cycles: As these producers, consumers and decomposers grow and die, they are using life's essential chemicals or nutrients, taking these nutrients from and returning them to their reservoirs in the earth's air, soil and waters over and over again.

Diversity: These essential chemicals or nutrients and the sunlight energy available have varied greatly in both amount and quality in many places and times, permitting a great number of different plants and animals to share the earth.

Community: Groups of different plants and animals are thus found living together on the earth in areas where the amount and quality of both the sunlight energy and these essential chemicals or nutrients best meet their individual needs.

Interrelationships: In meeting their needs all these plants and animals are constantly interacting with one another and with their surroundings in different ways.

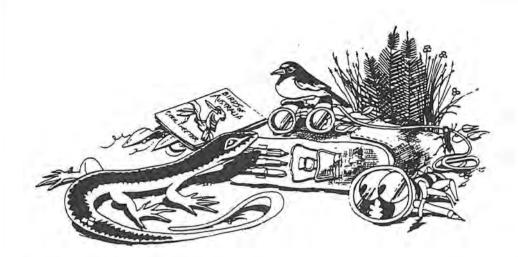
Change: Because they are in the process of both acting upon their surroundings and being acted upon, all plants and animals and the places where they live are in the process of becoming something else.

Adaptation: the overall story of life. Some plants and animals end up with new and successful ways of meeting their needs by solving the problems brought about by the altering of these conditions where they live. 12

While ecological processes will have a bearing on everything that an ecotour guide interprets, all natural systems also have a story of land formation and modification, wildlife (plants and animals), ecology (the relationship of land, water, weather and wildlife) and human activities over time and place (resource use, social, economic and political organisation, cultural expressions).

A careful analysis of these subjects will help you identify the specific topics to interpret for your clients. The more you learn about your topics, the better your foundation for more interesting and creative design of interpretive activities.

Section 5 develops further the relationship between story topics and themes.



RESOURCES FOR ECOTOURS

Apart from enthusiasm you need to develop your knowledge of natural and cultural resources for yourself and your staff, of people who have useful local knowledge and props (hands-on items) that can help build successful activities for your ecotour. You also need to consider professional development and training opportunities.

Sources of Knowledge

More than likely, you already know where to look to find suitable information to work with. Some possible sources include:

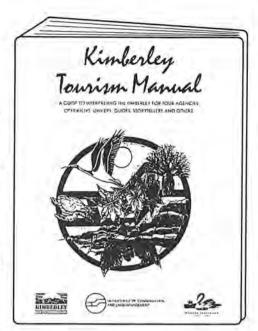
- ▶ Local libraries, State libraries
- ▶ Books or documentaries about the area's natural or cultural features
- Reference books about plants, animals, ecology, geology, land use, history, art, craft and so on
- Local Aboriginal group or corporation that may direct you to the Elders or senior cultural custodians
- People who have worked or lived in the area for a long time
- Management plans or technical reports for the area
- Local naturalist clubs, conservation groups and historical societies and museums
- ▶ Tourist bureaux/centres, brochures, newspaper articles
- Relevant internet sites, for example, http://life.csu.edu.au and http://kaos.eron.gov.au
- Local universities, TAFE or other education and research centres
- Government departments in the area such as conservation agencies, shire, land, marine, water, agriculture, environment departments – good for advice, reports and publications
- Industries including tourism, forestry, fishing, mining and agriculture

Think beyond those listed here and make up your own local area reference list and library. Researching a proposed region, area or site of operation can identify potential destinations and sites for assessment.

Site assessment is the search for special places that can accommodate ecotour group activities with minimal impact while providing opportunities for enriching experiences evocative of the themes and messages you want to convey (see Section 5: Establishing Ecotour Themes). The relationship between sites, themes and activities is explored in Section 6: Designing Ecotour Experiences.

People and Partnerships

Developing effective interpretation requires local knowledge from local people. People who have lived in or near an area for a long time can be invaluable sources of humorous anecdotes and little-known history as well as of special places to visit. Some local characters also make great



interpreters if they are willing to be part of an activity – perhaps to demonstrate a local skill like digging yams, woodcarving or whip cracking. Be sure to acknowledge such people for their contributions to your interpretive program in an appropriate way.

Working with a co-guide can enhance your interpretation. You might be the expert on plant ecology, but working with a local Aboriginal person who is knowledgeable about edible plants can dramatically improve the experience for your clients. Artists can also be contracted to encourage your clients to participate in creative ways. For instance, an ecotour which focuses on the bark of various trees and the creatures living under them could include a hands-on session making bark baskets.

The development of an ecotour can often depend on the degree to which partnerships can be forged between the operator and local land or wildlife managers, as well as among operators and guides. Partnerships can boost local knowledge, ease access to local markets, allow activities which may otherwise be unavailable (such as trapping animals or collecting plants which require a licence and specialised knowledge), and broaden opportunities for promotion.



Developing partnerships is easier through industry networks such as professional associations (for example, Ecotourism Association of Australia, Inbound Tourism Organisation of Australia) which organise training and information programs for their members and associates.

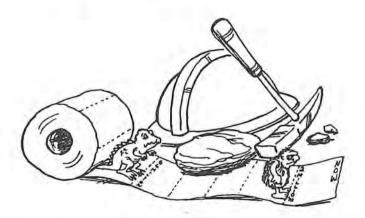
Props and Demonstrations

Items like binoculars, field guides, magnifying glasses, hand lenses, camping equipment, snorkels and masks, tour guidebooks and so on can all enhance an ecotour. Almost anything can be a prop. And the more unusual it is, the more memorable it will be for your clients. If you carry a knapsack which conceals interesting props, it increases the potential for curiosity and surprise. Your clients will wonder what you will whip out next. Some clever props include:

- laminated photocopy of a hand-written diary entry from an explorer in the 1800s;
- photocopies of old family photos placed in an 'old look' album which can be passed around among your clients;
- ▶ local fossil;
- grass tree or spinifex resin;
- old newspaper article about a famous earthquake or other relevant natural event;
- bird song recordings;
- bush song recordings; or
- artefacts to touch (for example, stone flakes, old belt buckle).

But how much more exciting the props are when you can see demonstrations of their use and, better still, try it for yourself. Consider these demonstrations and opportunities for participation.

- old stockwhip;
- yandi dish (Aboriginal dish for sifting ochre, seeds);
- aluminium can of beer to shake up for the purpose of demonstrating the pressure of a volcano or groundwater;
- roll of mock toilet paper that can be written on and rolled out as a timeline of geological and evolutionary changes;
- variety of hats to be put on when you are talking about particular characters in history;
- bird squeaker to imitate and call up inquisitive birds; or
- bush foods to taste (local honey, edible nuts).



It is also fun to conceal a prop somewhere in the area to which you will be taking your clients. When you arrive at the right spot you can suddenly reach for it. This is especially helpful if the prop won't fit in your knapsack.

Build up a store of your props and equipment which are labelled and kept in good repair. Regular inventory and maintenance will ensure the right props are ready for the right activity.

Professional Development and Training

The importance of building proficiency in interpretation and other key ecotourism skills, such as minimising impact (reduce, reuse, refuse, recycle) cannot be underestimated. According to a Green Jobs Survey, almost half the ecotourism operators required further training in areas such as customer service, public relations, foreign languages and interpretation. 13

Skills in interpretation are best learnt in a combination of ways:

- through first hand experience ('on the job' training);
- through exposure to other guides (for instance, at regional or national conferences and by attending the tours of other operators as a customer);
- participating in formal training and professional development;
- studying guidebooks, manuals and other professional reading material;
- watching television tour guides; and
- as an active member of professional associations such as the Interpretation Australia Association and the Ecotourism Association of Australia.

The most useful formal interpretive training courses involve a quality mix of theory and practical skills and carry formal recognition through national competency standards or academic qualifications. 14

According to the Ecotourism Association of Australia, "Some form of education and training should be periodically undertaken by everyone in the ecotourism industry. Training is a key component to ensuring the industry remains viable and its practices sustainable". 15

Anyone planning a career in ecotourism needs to consider the following:

- decide what training is necessary before you start looking for opportunities;
- thoroughly research and compare opportunities;
- spend time gathering the relevant certificates through formal courses (useful certificates may include a bus driving licence, outboard mechanics ticket, first aid certificate, basic Japanese, certificate in designing interpretive activities); and
- get as much work experience as possible, regardless of the remuneration offered.

In 1998, standards for tour guides (National Tourism Competencies) were reviewed to reflect the changes in the industry including a more sophisticated, knowledgeable market which demands more authentic environmental and cultural experiences.

^{13.} Australian Conservation Foundation and Australian Council of Trade Unions, 1994, Green Jobs in Industry, pp. 50-56

Australian Ecotourism Guide 1997/98, p. 48
 Australian Ecotourism Guide 1997/98, p. 49

The sole form of course accreditation that is nationwide, fully portable across States (and institutions), and recognised through the tourism industry is that accredited by the Australian Tourism Training Review Panel (ATTRP), which operates under the auspices of Tourism Training Australia and the Tourism Training Network.



Recognition for the importance of ecotour guides is gaining momentum through the development of a National Ecotour Guide Certification Program funded by the Commonwealth Government's National Tourism Development Program which will be launched in 2000.

The assessment process for this program will be conducted in the workplace and will pay particular attention to the competencies of relevance to the ecotourism industry, that is, i) interpretation and communication skills; ii) minimal impact techniques; and iii) best environmental practice messages. A major advantage to ecotour guides will be national recognition for those who become certified within the Program. For further details contact:

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A variety of national training information is available from each State office of the Tourism Training Network. It is written to inform students, apprentices, industry employees, host employers, teachers and colleges in all aspects of tourism and hospitality career paths. For further information, contact your State Tourism Training representative. In Western Australia, this organisation is known as WA Hospitality and Tourism Industry Training Council.

Another useful source of training information is a database known as the National Training Information System, available through the internet at www.curriculum.edu.au. Developed by the Australian National Training Authority, this source lists training organisations, courses, qualifications, training packages and competency standards.

It is always a good idea to check with tourism industry training councils on a State by State basis for additional local information.

The majority of the courses listed by the Tourism Training Network in the tour guiding sector are general in nature. They do not focus specifically on ecotourism or cultural tourism.

Two courses you may like to investigate that are nationally accredited in this field are discussed below.

Designing Interpretive Activities Workshop (DIAW) is a short course on designing interpretive ecotours with units that meet national tourism industry competency standards and is accredited by the Australian Tourism Training Review Panel (ATTRP). This is a four day course developed by senior interpretive staff at CALM. A certificate is issued to successful participants. This course is also available for purchase by registered training providers in the form of a Leader's Manual and Participant's Workbook. For information on the course and/or training manuals, contact:

Department of Conservation and Land Management, Western Australia Visitor Interpretation Services

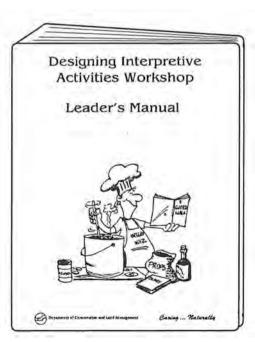
Ph: 08 9334 0333 Fax: 08 9334 0583

▶ The Certificate in Aboriginal Cultural Instruction and Tour Guiding, conducted by Tauondi Inc. (formerly Aboriginal Community College) in South Australia. The Certificate is a 12 month course designed for Aboriginal people seeking employment in the tourism and cultural education sectors and is the first course of its kind to be accredited by the ATTRP. For information, contact:

Tauondi Inc. PO Box 409 Port Adelaide, SA 5015 Ph: 08 8240 0300 Fax: 08 8240 0786

email: tauondi@ctel.com.au





STABLISHING ECOTOUR THEMES

To be clear about the purpose of your communication with clients and to ensure that the point of your ecotour is received, you need to develop specific objectives, themes and messages. These steps will form the heart and soul of your ecotour.

Ecotourism is more than outdoor entertainment. It should be enjoyable and entertaining while enriching the experience of your clients. It needs to be organised around a theme so as to convey a message.

Here, the words 'theme' and 'message' are used interchangeably. Using the word 'message' is a reminder that an ecotour should always present a particular environmental message, never just a list of facts about a topic. Establishing distinct objectives and themes/messages will also be very useful when it comes to promoting your ecotour. However, your themes/messages need to be tailored for your particular client group.



SETTING OBJECTIVES

Objectives are the communication outcomes you desire for your audience. To determine an objective for each activity on your ecotour, write down the answers to these questions:

- 1. What knowledge will participants gain from the activity?
- What skills will the participants gain from the activity?
- 3. What attitudes/values will be discussed or integrated into the activity that participants can take away with them?
- 4. What actions will participants be able to take as a result of the activity?



For example, in a wildlife observation activity entitled 'Follow the Flock', the objectives might include:

- knowledge of bird habitat, bird watching techniques and equipment;
- skills of applying bird watching techniques and using binoculars and field guides so as to be able to identify birds;
- appreciating birds, their behaviour and habitat and the fun of bird watching; and
- participants will be able to bird watch successfully on their own after taking part in the activity.

DEVELOPING THEMES AND MESSAGES

The theme or message of an ecotour is what a client will recall after other details of the experience have been forgotten. Consider a theme as if it were the plot of a movie – you can usually sum up the point of a recent movie in one sentence and an interpretive activity should be no different.

Themes/messages should:

- be written in short, simple, complete sentences;
- contain only one main idea;
- reveal the overall purpose of the presentation; and
- be worded in an interesting manner (active verbs are best).¹⁶

16. Environmental Interpretation: A Practical Guide for People with Big Ideas and Small Budgets, S. Ham, 1992. p.38

An example of a theme/message for the 'Follow the Flock' activity might be:

Some of the best places to find birds are areas where habitat types meet.

This overall theme can then serve as the basis for sub-themes such as:

- Evidence of birds may appear in the form of scratchings, droppings, pellets, damaged fruits and flowers.
- You can relate the day's weather to the dispersal of bird life.
- Most Australian parrots nest in tree hollows.
- Gaps exist in the printed knowledge about many bird species which means you could contribute quite a bit if you become a keen observer.

These sub-themes may then be demonstrated at different sites or stations through different interpretive activities within an ecotour. The sub-themes are the ideas or concepts or principles or facts – the messages you want to convey to your clients over the course of the tour or activity.

Keep in mind that the topic of your interpretive presentation is *not the same* as a theme. A topic such as birds can have many themes depending on what the guide wishes to communicate to clients. You'll notice that a bit more thinking is required to come up with a theme/message for your ecotour experiences.

Table 3. Interpretive Topics and Themes

Examples of Interpretive Topics	Examples of a possible theme/message for your clients		
Woodland birds	Some of the best places to find birds are those where habitat types meet.		
Wetland management	Vegetated catchments make our wetlands cleaner.		
Endangered species	A poisonous plant is saving native animals in Western Australia,		
Looking at insects	Insects deceive their predators with a variety of strategies.		
Caves	Water movement over thousands of years created the unusual cave formations in this region.		
Gondwana	South Africa was once part of the same land mass of Australia and so has many similar plants.		
Aboriginal tool making	Nyoongar Aboriginal people of south-western Australia devised at least 15 practical uses for grass trees.		



FINDING YOUR FOCUS

In a creative business like designing ecotour activities, feel free to hop around with your design – it is not meant to be a linear process. Writing your activity objectives may come before or after writing the themes and messages. The thing that matters is that the various components come together in the end.

Once you have determined the nature of your ecotour product, collected reliable information about your site(s) and become familiar with it, divide it up into i) broad subject headings, ii) interpretive topics, and iii) themes/messages for your clients.

For example, your analysis might include some of the ideas in Table 4.

The themes are the focus for your clients various learning styles. They address the questions *why*, *what*, *how* and *what if* that we seek to answer (see Section 3: Planning an Ecotour Program: Knowing your Clients).

Finding your focus often involves quite a bit of thinking, playing around with words and testing them out on colleagues and others. Once you have established your themes the next challenge is to choose appropriate types of interpretive activities to use in your ecotour and the best places to conduct them.

Broad subject headings	Possible topics for interpretation	Possible Themes/Messages for your clients
		(These are themes for your ecotourism activity as well as the message you want your audience to take away with them.)
Landforms and natural processes	Caves - the subterranean world	Water movement created the unusual cave formations in this region.
	Gondwana	The Australian continent has similar plants to South Africa because the nation was once part of the same land mass.
Plants	Weeds in wetlands	Vegetated catchments make our wetlands cleaner.
	Micro plant world	A tiny plant can have a big impact on a boulder.
Animals	Desert mammal adaptations	Many species adjust their behaviour to conserve body fluids.
	Looking at insects	Insects deceive their predators with clever strategies.
Ecological Communities and Concepts	Plant-environment relationships	Everything in nature is interconnected: Plants adapt to sun, water and soil conditions.
	Decomposition	Everything is on its way to becoming something else.
Aboriginal Culture	Dreaming stories	To understand Aboriginal heritage, one must understand the Aboriginal connection with the land.
	Aboriginal tool making	Grass trees provided food, shelter and warmth for south-western Australian Aboriginal people
Colonial History	Exploration	Early European explorers confronted fear and the great unknown to achieve their aims.
	Aboriginal and early settler relationships	Early European settlers used Aboriginal knowledge to survive
Land/water use and management	Minimum impact bushwalking	Visitors can enjoy the bush and still leave no trace of their visit.
	Dieback disease	Controlling vehicle and visitor access helps protect these slopes from dieback disease.
Bushcraft Skills	Snorkelling	Developing proficiency in snorkelling will allow you to notice and appreciate a greater number of sea creatures.
	Survival in the Outback	You can survive in the Australian Outback with a survival kit the size of a

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soap dish.

ESIGNING ECOTOUR EXPERIENCES

Learning what is special or unique about an area helps you to consider likely topics for interpretation and to determine appropriate themes and messages. The next step is to work out which specific sites, styles of activities and interpretive design techniques might suit those themes. There are lots of alternatives.

However, plan to disperse your ecotour activities across the suite of design techniques to appeal to the range of learning styles and interests. Activities of interest to your clients will vary depending upon the character of your clients, nature of the region, the season and what your ecotours are designed to offer. Be sure to include both active and passive styles and sequence the activities to accommodate the capabilities and desires of your clients and the time of day.

Activities can be classified into a number of design techniques and identified as either active or passive. Table 5 gives some examples.

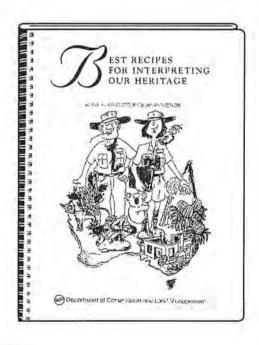


Table 5. Some Interpretive Design Techniques

Interpretive Design Techniques	Examples of Specific Activities	Style	
Arts and craft activities	Aboriginal dance	passive/active	
(including performing arts)	bush basket weaving	active	
	puppet-making	active	
	story-telling	active	
	games	active	
Concept exploring activities	Endangered species management	passive/active	
Guided tours	kayaking frip	active	
	river cruise	active	
	4WD trips	passive/active	
	guided walk	active	
Problem solving activities	survival techniques	active	
	cave exploring	active	
	map reading/orienteering	active	
Sensory activities	bush meditation	passive	
	blindfolds and sensory trail	active	
	guided imagery/visualisation	passive	
	listening/viewing tubes	passive	
Wildlife observations	plant identification	active	
	birdwatching	active	
Evening and morning activities	spotlighting	active	
	moonrise walks	active	
	audio-visual presentations	passive	
	campfire stories, songs	passive	
	dawn chorus bird walk	active	

Evening activities can be cost effective in maximising audiences looking for fresh outdoor entertainment. Accommodation centres and attractions hosting evening programs will usually appeal to most people, including resort guests, local residents and campers.

An overnight ecotour with planned evening interpretation can be something special with stories, slide presentations, performances and spotlighting combined with refreshments, particularly if the food and drink are thematically catered. Billy tea and damper or johnny cakes are simple, as is bush tucker of kangaroo and emu kebabs, but also consider contemporary bush cuisine such as wattle seed and chocolate cake or pancakes with 'rosella' (native hibiscus) jam.

INTERPRETIVE DESIGN TECHNIQUES

Table 6 has examples of design techniques and activities matched to the ecotour themes/messages listed in Table 4 (page 35).

Broad Subject Heading	Possible Topics for Interpretation	Possible Themes/ Messages for your clients	Possible Interpretive Design Techniques, Props and Ideas for Participation
Landforms and natural processes	Caves - the subterranean world	Water movement created the unusual cave formations in this region.	Problem solving activity: Above ground, discuss and pass around a large (but not too heavy!) piece of limestone which has holes and spaces in it made by the passage of water. Hold it up, use a couple of pebbles to pass through the chambers to symbolise the participants about to make their way through the spaces made by water. (passive/active)
	Gondwana	The Australian continent has similar plants to South Africa because the nation was once part of the same land mass.	Concept exploring activity: Use jigsaw puzzle of continents to show movement over time. (passive)
Plants	Weeds in wetlands	Vegetated catchments make our wetlands cleaner.	Problem solving activity: Group removal of weeds choking a waterway and replacement with native vegetation. (active)
	Micro plant world	A tiny plant can have a big impact on a boulder.	Concept exploring activity: Guided imagery of the effects over time of plants growing on a granite outcrop. At end, with participants' eyes still closed, go around and pour into their cupped hands a little of the outcome of that impact: soft soll (passive)
Animals	Desert mammal adaptations	Many species adjust their behaviour to conserve body fluids,	Problem solving activity: Discussion with group; looking at mammal tracks and traces and then at specimens and discussing their identity and adaptations for survival. (active/passive)
	Looking at insects	Insects deceive their predators with clever strategies.	Sensory/Concept exploring activity/ Evening activity: Slide presentation using close-up shots of various local insects showing their deception strategies and how they don't always work! (passive)
Ecological Communities	Plant-environment relationships	Everything In nature is interconnected.	Concept exploring activity/Arts activity: Puppet show (with audience participation) about an area where native plants are removed and the subsequent damage to other aspects of the environment. (passive)
	Energy cycles and decomposition	Plants adapt to sun, water and soil conditions. Everything is on its way to becoming something else.	Arts activity: While sifting with a group in antechinus habitat, read aloud "The Energy of Allan Antechinus", a large format story book about how Allan is eaten by an owl and what happens to his 'energy' over time. Combine with brief dissection of owl pellet(s), (passive/active)

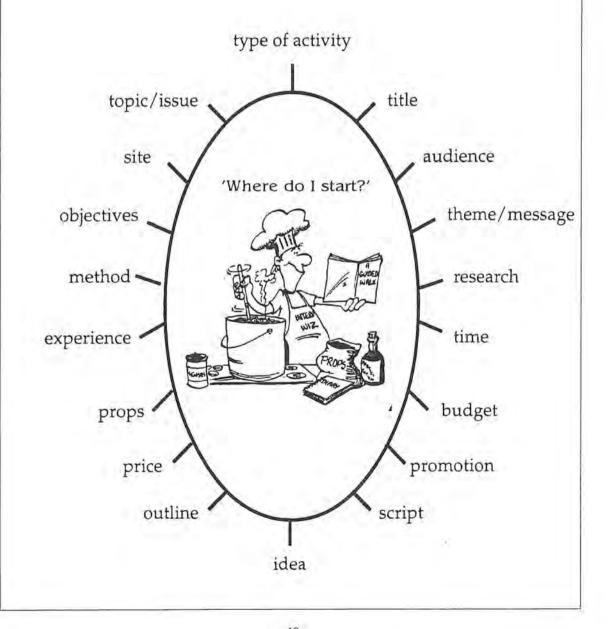
Broad Subject Heading	Possible Topics for Interpretation	Possible Themes/ Messages for your clients	Possible Interpretive Design Techniques, Props and Ideas for Participation
Aboriginal Culture	Dreaming stories	To understand Aboriginal heritage, one must understand the Aboriginal connection with the land.	Evening activity: Aboriginal Elder shares Dreaming stories with audience; discusses traditional and present day activities associated with culture and land. (passive)
	Aboriginal tool making	Grass trees provided food, shelter and warmth for southwestern Australian Aboriginal people.	Craft activity: Make glue using grass tree resin, 'roo poo and charcoal; build shelter using fronds; make drink with flowers. (active)
Colonial History	Exploration	Early European explorers confronted fear and the 'great unknown' to achieve their aims.	Problem solving activity: Fill saddlebags with the items that an early explorer would have had to make an arduous journey while discussing the value each item would have. Read aloud from sections of an explorer's diary. (passive)
	Aboriginal and early settler relationships	Early European settlers used Aboriginal knowledge to survive.	Problem solving activity: Play tape recorded oral histories or re-enactments of early settlers to convey experiences to the group. (passive)
Land/water use and management	Minimum impact bushwalking	Visitors can enjoy the bush and still leave no trace of their visit,	Guided tour: Demonstrate techniques of minimal impact bushwalking. (active
	Dieback disease	Controlling vehicle and visitor access helps protect these slopes from dieback disease.	Performing Art: Participatory performance about affects of dieback on native plants and animals and how humans can help. (active)
Bushcraft Skills	Snorkelling	Developing proficiency in snorkelling will allow you to notice and appreciate a greater number of sea creatures.	Guided tour/ problem solving activity/ wildlife observations: Demonstrate snorkel technique and set up mini snorkel trail with weighted items underwater for participants to find and bring up; finally go on a short group snorkel to observe local marine life. (active)
	Survival in the Outback	You can survive in the Australian Outback with a survival kit the size of a soap dish.	Problem solving activity: Engage in exercise with participants to determine what items would be essential for Outback survival, then demonstrate use of survival kit items. Give participants a go as well. (active)

THE INTERPRETIVE ACTIVITY PLANNER

Use the Interpretive Activity Planner template for your interpretive activity design. The planner sets a standard for interpretive activity design by providing a comprehensive framework. Join several together to form a half day (or longer) ecotour.

It doesn't matter where you start on the planner. You might begin with a great idea for a theme, or even just a title, and then determine the objectives, find the right site or the right props and so on. Just as long as you address all of the points, you will have designed a sound, integrated interpretive experience for your clients.

The Interpretive Activity Design Process



TITLE	THEME/MESSAGE	
	The theme is your intended message for clients to tak away with them.	
TOPIC		
Natural Values		
Landscape/Seascape/Processes		
Plants		
Animals		
Ecology		
Cultural Values	CAPTION/SLOGAN FOR ACTIVITY	
Aboriginal/History/Heritage	(OPTIONAL)	
Lifestyle		
Customs		
Religion		
Law/Lore		
Entertainment		
Resource use		
Land/Water/Sea		
Food		
Tools	LA CONTRACTOR AND A STATE OF THE STATE OF TH	
Shelter	DESIGN TECHNIQUE	
Clothing		
Management Issues	Talk	
Visitors	Walk/drive	
Fire	Wildlife observations	
Ferals	Concept exploring Arts and craft	
Weeds	Sensory	
Wise use	Problem solving	

THE EXPERIENCE	OBJECTIVES
Use as many learning styles as possible. What will participants: See?	These are your desired outcomes. What knowledge will participants gain?
Heor?	
Do?	What skills will the participants gain?
Make?	
Feel? (emotionally)	What attitudes/values will be discussed/integrated into the activity that the clients can take away with them?
AUDIENCE Consider 'visitor profile' (country of origin: cultural preferences: special interests) Children 6 - 10 Children 11 - 12	
Young Adults 18 - 25 Adults Family Groups	What actions will participants be able to take as a result of the activity?
Maximum	
Minimum	

	OUTLINE	SITE	BUDGET
	The major points that hold the activity together - include introduction, activity steps or points, and conclusion/theme.	Describe site essentials. Map attached (optional) TIME LENGTH	PARTICIPANT
	Introduction	TIME OF DAY	THE SCRIPT AN
		Morning Evening Afternoon Anytime PROPS	EVALUATION Number attending
42		For leader to supply	
	Воду	For participants to bring	Age groups
		PROMOTION	
		What? (write the advertisement)	
		When/where? (state time and place)	Overall audience
	Conclusion	How? (the media)	

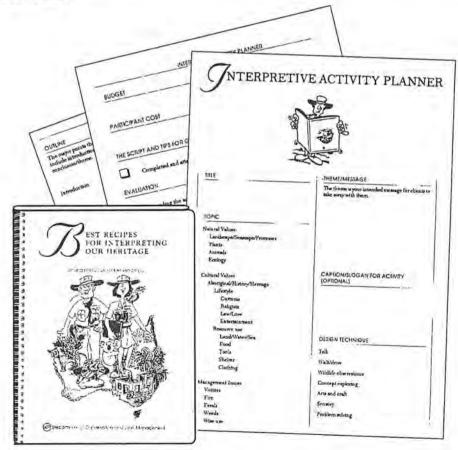
BUDGET				Self Evaluation	
PARTICIPANT	COST			Which objectives did you achieve?	
THE SCRIPT A	ND TIPS FO	R GUIDE			
Comple	eted and attac	ched			
EVALUATION	1				
Number attendir	ng the activity				
				How could you improve your activity?	
Age groups					
	6 - 10		18 - 25		
	11-12		26 - 60		
	13 - 17		61+		
Overall audience	e response			Participant Evaluation Survey	
				attached	
				REVISED ACTIVITY PLANNER	
				Revised planner attached	

An ecotour guide can never be over-prepared. It is well worth writing a full script for each activity on an ecotour so that all the major points are covered in the most powerful ways possible. You can't always count on that Wedge-tailed eagle swooping down for prey right next to your clients, but you can rely on thorough interpretive preparation. Your scripts will be invaluable in preparing for your tour on subsequent occasions and for jogging the faded memory. Objectives and themes are essential to revisit on those days when you ask yourself "Why am I doing this?" The interpretive activity planner will keep you focused on the interpretive intent of your guided activities and tours.

The planner also has an evaluation section built into it. Use it whenever you conduct the activity to check whether you achieved your objectives and how you can improve your guiding next time.

The care that you put into interpretive activity design significantly enhances the quality of your guided tours. The design of the activity is just as important as the presentation. A sound design with clear objectives and a definite theme for a guided experience that goes beyond presentation to include demonstration and participation will assure the interpretive quality of the activity. The presentation skills of the guide will markedly enhance the quality of the experience. However, the converse of a skilled presenter with a poor design will more often relegate a guided activity into the realms of entertainment and not interpretation.

Ecotour guides need to familiarise themselves with the suite of interpretive design techniques that include concept exploring, problem solving, arts and crafts, sensory activities and wildlife observation skills (Table 5). Using a variety of design techniques for your activities within an ecotour provides diversity for your clients.



SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Different people are stimulated in different ways on an ecotour. Some are stimulated by movement (hands-on activities), others by words and images (minds-on activities) and still others primarily through what they hear or what they see. Most people, however, are stimulated through a combination of these, often with a bias towards one method. Design your ecotours with something appealing for everyone by including such things as hands-on props, slides, maps, music or taped sounds, dance or movement.

Once your clients' minds are stimulated by something presented on an ecotour, they have different preferential styles of learning, different ways of processing and digesting new information and experiences.

- Innovative learners ask "Why is it so?"; they look for the meaning behind the information.
- Analytical learners are keen to know the facts, the technical details.
- Practical learners want to know how something came about or how it works.
- Dynamic learners ask "What if...?"; they are experimental in their approach.

You'll find that most people tend towards one style of learning although they may also be open to other approaches. It can be illuminating to look at these styles from your personal bias. Usually, without realising it, ecotour guides plan activities which tend towards their preferred learning style. Be aware of the different learning styles. Catering for them will substantially enrich the experience for your clients.

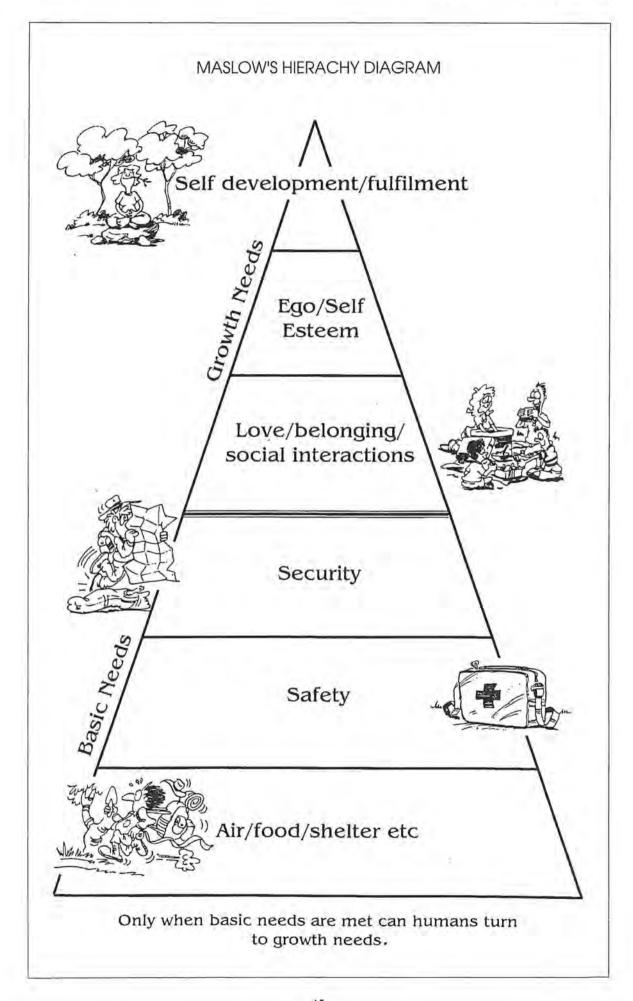
When you are unfamiliar with your audience, think about what all human beings have in common: the need for food, drink, warmth, security and companionship. As an ecotour guide, you should consider these basic human needs before aspiring to intellectually or spiritually enlighten your clients.

As a rule we will achieve the best communication by clearly identifying the target audience and planning our program specifically for them. For instance, communicating with a multi-cultural group with English as a second language requires a guide who makes extensive use of visual and hands-on techniques. Your presentation should focus primarily on demonstration and participation.

Choose analogies relevant to your group. Make a point of finding out about your clients – such as their origins, interests and expectations. For example, most young adults' ears perk up with references to 'sex and violence', so you might make a point of speaking about male phascogales (brush-tailed, carnivorous marsupials) that exhaust themselves mating with the females and die. In ecological terms, this year's mature males die off, making way for next year's young males that now do not have to compete with them for food or females.

When your audience consists of mixed ages and interests such as family members, work hard to involve everyone. Pitch your discussion to meet the average comprehension level, then use a 'wave pattern' from simple to complex and back again.

For example, you might pitch your talk generally about the role camouflage plays in a frog's life and how colouring can help protect frogs from being seen by predators. Then you can reach a higher level of comprehension by discussing a recent study on the long term effects of pollution on frogs – an early indicator



species of the health of wetlands. Later you can reach any kids in the audience (and perhaps 'the kid in all of us') by talking about what they are wearing and how easy it would be for a predator to spot their brightly coloured jumpers in the bush. Although kids are not usually participants in ecotours, they are often involved in interpretive activities programs at resorts and parks. Keep in mind that parents will only be comfortably attentive when their children are comfortable by being included in an ecotour's activities.

CREATIVE SCRIPTING

Here are some key points for scripting presentations.

Use simple language, not jargon.

Consider the difference between saying:

'plant communities' and 'groups of plants';

'fixing nitrogen' and 'making nitrogen';

'remnant vegetation' and 'plants left behind' (after development or fire);

'biodiversity' and 'the massive amount of different plants and animal species'.

It's not that you can't introduce scientific terms. You just need to be aware that terms used commonly by specialists are often poorly understood. While using some scientific terms may appeal to the analytical learners mentioned earlier, they can also turn off people with other learning styles if they are not explained.

Use similes.

You might say: "The pressure under the earth was just like this can of beer that I'm shaking up. It grew and grew until it reached the surface and thrust up these big rock formations" or "A leaf is like a factory."

Use metaphors.

You might say: "Back then, the earth under the sea was a big pressure cooker just waiting to blow" or "A tree is nature's boarding house."

Relate to people/use appropriate analogies.

You might say: "At your house when you're making a vegie garden you know you always have to be careful to prepare the soil to support your seeds. Well, the Australian bush is like a garden, too. Certain plants in the bush need the heat of fire and smoke to crack their seeds before they can sprout."

Provoke your clients.

You might say: "The original people we are going to find out about today created a superglue thousands of years ago by mixing 'roo poo', plant resin and charcoal."

Tease them.

Refer early in the ecotour to something you will do or say later on: "This activity is about orchids and we're going to see some spectacular ones. To me the most exciting of all is the one that masquerades as a female wasp! But we'll come to that later..."

Correct the past.

People enjoy hearing about mistakes. For example, many people are under the impression that the explorers Burke and Wills perished from thirst. Actually research reveals that what killed them was eating the nardoo plant which they assumed was safe to eat as they had seen Aborigines eating it. Nardoo contains an enzyme which is poisonous if it is not first leached out as the Aborigines knew to do. Burke and Wills perished because they were not aware of this fact.

Tell stories.

This doesn't involve being a talented yarn spinner, though if you are, that is very good. Why not read a story aloud or tell a personal story which you know well and conveys a relevant experience or message.

Use repetition.

Using the same or a similar phrase a few times is memorable. For instance:

"One day long ago some people brought a strange animal to Australia which changed it forever...the fox."

"One day long ago a strange disease was transported to Australia which would change the vegetation forever...dieback disease."

Make a powerful conclusion.

Conclude your activity by powerfully summarising your theme as the message you want your clients to take away with them. Do not leave this part to chance – it's best to practice the exact ending you want.

The quality of an ecotour is closely linked to the quality of the interpretation demonstrated by the guide.

Let's take a look at a sample ecotour program that demonstrates the outcome of the planning and design process.

THE GOIN' UP THE COUNTRY ECOTOUR PROGRAM

This sample ecotour program has been designed as a day tour for an English speaking adult audience. The tour is scheduled for a Friday in June from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. It is entitled *Goin' Up the Country – Looking at Relationships* and is a guided ecotour to experience natural, historic and cultural values of the region between Fremantle, Perth's Port City and The Hills Forest east of Perth, Western Australia.

The title of the ecotour, *Goin' Up the Country*, is meant to be catchy and is based on a song from the late 1960s that is now the theme song for the ecotour. Another song from the band Canned Heat, *On the Road Again*, is played as the finale before leaving the 'country' and returning to Perth. The ecotour program time, title of activities and information provided in the first three columns of Table 7 should be available for clients. Next to each component are notes with explanations and design hints for guides only.

Each interpretive activity in Goin' Up the Country has been carefully designed and fully scripted. Some of these scripts may be found in Best Recipes for Interpreting Our Heritage: Activities for Ecotour Guides and Others¹⁷. The overall theme of Goin' Up the Country is "The heritage of Perth is the story of relationships – the relationship between the Port City of Fremantle, the Swan River and its tributaries and the forests and wildlife of the hinterland". Each activity within the program has a specific theme that complements this overall program theme. Table 8 provides the activity titles, design techniques and themes for the Goin' Up the Country ecotour.

^{17.} Best Recipes for Interpreting our Heritage: Activities for Ecotour Guides and Others, CALM, August 1998. p. 37.

Time	Title of Activity in the 'Goin' Up the Country' Ecotour	Information	Explanations and design hints for guides
8:30 am	The O'Connor Connection	Board the bus for a magical mystery tour exploring the links between Fremantle and The Hills Forest.	Concept exploring activity: During this half hour ride the guide will interpret various landmarks and give clients a feel for where they are and where they are going. There should be a sense of mystery conveyed and excitement about what they will encounter during the day.
9:00 am	Cultural Perspectives	Get the picture on the Swan River and the natural communities of the Swan Coastal Plain. Contrast this perspective with that of the Nyoongar Aboriginal People of Perth.	Concept exploring activity: Tourism studies show most tourists want genuine cultural content as part of their experience while in Australia, This part of the ecotour is an opportunity to meet with local Nyoongar Aboriginal people who provide an alternative cultural perspective of the landscape,
9:45 am	The Shape of Things to Come	Explore the Mundaring Sculpture Park, find and hear historic links with Mundaring Weir,	Sensory activity: The ecotour interprets attractions chronologically so this next section looks at European history. It is not a talkfest, however. Clients will be active participants to find historic links with the Weir.
10:15 am	Morning Tea	At The Hills Forest. Be refreshed for the fun to follow with biscuits made from local honey and fruit and a hot cuppa.	Play the ecotour theme song; 'Goin up the Country'; clients have a chance to go to the tollet; enjoy some local food; adjust to the bush ambience.
10:30 am	Rock and Roll	More than the musica concept building activity on geological time and place	Concept exploring activity: Using a simple, everyday prop (a roll of toilet paper) and marking it as a fimeline tool can instantly turn the ordinary into the unusual to keep client interest the concept of geological and biological change.
11:15 am	Tuning In	A sensory immersion experience (or should that be 'zen-sory'?)	Sensory activity: This activity gives everyone (the guide as well) the chance to unwind, relax and tune into themselves and their bush surrounding
11:35 am	Getting in Touch	Let your fingers do the talking!	A tactile sensory activity
12:05 pm	Serpent Scales	Where did all those colours come from?	A visual sensory activity
12:30 pm	Lunch	Time to refuel with local produce and providers.	Sensory activity: Make sure the food is of good quality with a local touch.
1:15 pm	Meet the Plants	Can't see the trees for the forest?	A wildlife observation activity
2:00 pm	Bush Survival	Not as scary as it sounds,	Problem solving activity; Discover the wealth of bush resources for meeting our needs for shelte food, drink and clothing.
2:45 pm	Afternoon Tea		Serve special gourmet wattle seed teacake wit a drink and give out ecotour memento to each client (Aboriginal print drawstring bag with copy of gourmet wattle seed recipe and small quantity of commercially available ground wattle seeds).
3:00 pm	On the Road Again	Depart The Hills Forest for the return journey via the Weir and Kalamunda.	Play the song 'On the Road Again.'
4:30 pm	Farewell to Freo		

Table 8. Goin up the Country Ecotour Activity Then	Up the Country Ecotour Activity Theme	v Them	Activity	Ecotour .	Country	the the	Up	Goin'	Table 8.
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Title of Activity	Design Technique	Theme
The O'Connor Connection	Guided tour	The Engineer C. Y. O'Connor was significant to the development of Perth and Western Australia providing transport corridors from Port to hinterland for goods and services.
Cultural Perspectives	Concept exploring activity	Nyoongar Aborigines have a spiritual, economic and social relationship with the Swan River and its tributaries.
The Shape of Things to Come	Guided walk (Exhibit observations)	Community art projects can help us appreciate our heritage.
Rock and Roll	Concept exploring activity	Rocks are indicators of the processes of landscape formation and modification over time.
Tuning In	Sensory activity	Tuning into nature is a turn on.
Getting in Touch	Sensory activity	Plant diversity provides for a variety of sensory and communicative responses.
Serpent Scales	Sensory activity	Seeing the land from an Aboriginal cultural perspective is a special experience.
Meet the Plants	Wildlife observations	There is much more to appreciating plants than just knowing their names. Plants have particular features which enable them to fit in where they live, interacting with the soil and the other plants and animals in their natural community.
Bush Survival	Problem solving activity	The bush is a living museum of the natural resources used by people in the past. Live lightly on the land to protect our heritage.

UNNING AN ECOTOUR PROGRAM

SCHEDULING AN ECOTOUR PROGRAM

The timing of an ecotour program is critical. You'll need to consider the seasonal demand which may be influenced by international economic trends, weather conditions, school holidays or the presence of a particular feature (such as spring wildflowers) before you settle on your ecotour schedule. An ecotour will most likely require 12 months promotion for international clients, two or three months for locals and six to 12 months in design and development.

Once you've developed your program, set yourself a timetable for the promotion. For example, if you plan a program at an accommodation centre or attraction for the summer school holidays (December–January), have it ready to promote from September and be ready to commence the program in December.

Issues you need to address in the formative stage of your program development include:

- number of participants on ecotours;
- length of ecotours;
- what else is on (consult an annual events calendar for your region or State. Events calendars may be obtained through tourism commissions). Depending on the nature of the activities program there may be times when a local event can be effectively incorporated into the program and vice versa with the event promoting your ecotour.
- resources available (people, props and so on);
- type of clientele. Consider where they are staying or coming from and their expectations of things to do.
- how the program may fit into co-operative programming at an attraction or centre; and
- how the program will be funded/sponsored.

PRICING AN ECOTOUR

Determining the price of an ecotour must be done well in advance of promotion as it is extremely difficult to change a price once promotional materials have been printed and distributed. Commission is usually a major source of revenue for the different types of agents who might sell your ecotours and it is necessary to build commission payments into your price structure.19

Listed below is the minimum information which an ecotour operator would need in order to determine price.

- Minimal profit required for viability of business
- 2. Requirements to conduct ecotour, including:
- Staff (including ecotour guides who may be members of an ecotour operator's staff or guides hired specifically to conduct particular ecotours)
- Equipment/props
- Transport
- Permit fees
- Food/consumables
- Other
- 3. Frequency of conducting the ecotour
- 4. Fixed costs (costs that do not vary with the number of participants)
- Staff
- Transport
- Insurance for product and public liability
- Other
- 5. Variable costs (costs that change according to the number of participants)
- Food/consumables
- Hire charges
- 6. Variation of costs over time
- Seasonal prices
- Availability of quality staff
- Commissions payable to sales agents.²⁰

Commission rates will vary depending on the level of agent that you use. The normal commission rates are as follows:

Retail agent 10 per cent

20 per cent (10 per cent of which will be paid to a retail Wholesale agent

25 to 30 per cent (some of which will be paid to Inbound operator

wholesale and retail agents)

When calculating the effect of commission rates on your net return, carefully consider the 'market mix' of the commissions. For example, an ecotour might have 10 passengers, five of whom have booked direct where no commission is paid, three through a retail agent where 10 per cent is paid, and two through a

^{19.} Tourism Marketing Guide, WATC, June 1998, p. 6 20. Tourism Marketing Guide, WATC, June 1998, p. 35

wholesaler where 20 per cent is paid. In this case, the average commission paid on the whole tour is only 7 per cent.

The market mix will obviously vary from one situation to another and should be considered when calculating your price. It should also be looked at in terms of the benefits and savings against your own cost of obtaining the business from these agents. Agents will do some of the marketing for you and they are only paid when they are successful.

A wholesaler or a General Sales Agent (GSA) can look after much of the marketing and booking requirements for a small operator. This may well suit a smaller business that needs the majority of its time devoted to its actual operations.

A spreadsheet (see Table 9) can be developed to show what the cost of the activity would be and then a selling price, thus identifying minimum numbers and the profit projections.

The example is for the sample ecotour *Goin' Up the Country*. It will be held three days a week and sold through retail agents at a commission of 10 per cent.

Table 9. A Financial Spreadsheet for an Ecotour

Goin'	Up the
Col	intrv.

Fixed costs	-										
Number of participants	J	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20
Wages (ecotour operator/guide's salary and expenses)	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100
Transport (hire of 22 seater coach and a driver)	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120
Variable costs											
Area entry fee	\$3	6	12	18	24	30	36	42	48	54	60
Morning and Afternoon teas and lunch (provided by operator)	\$12	\$24	\$48	\$72	\$96	\$120	\$144	\$168	\$192	\$216	\$240
Ecotour memento	\$3	6	12	18	24	30	36	42	48	54	60
Total costs (divided by number of passengers)	\$238	\$256	\$292	\$328	\$364	\$400	\$436	\$472	\$508	\$544	\$580
Per/passenger		\$119	\$72.50	\$54.67	\$45.50	\$40	\$36.33	\$33.71	\$31.75	\$30.22	\$29
Suggested retail price	\$65	\$130	\$260	\$390	\$520	\$650	\$780	\$910	\$1040	\$1170	\$1300
Commissions	\$16.25	\$32.50	\$65	497.50	\$130	\$162.50	\$195	\$227.50	\$260	\$292.50	\$325
Operator's profit after costs and commissions (10% travel agent; 15% wholesaler)	-\$188,75	-\$158.50	-\$97	\$35.50	\$26	\$87.50	\$149	\$210.50	\$272	\$333.50	\$395

The spreadsheet shows the fixed costs of staff and transport (one 20-seater bus and two staff regardless of passenger numbers). The variable costs are the entry fee of \$3, morning and afternoon tea and lunch for each participant, the activity props (if consumables) and the ecotour memento. The total cost of the activity can then be divided by the number of participants to determine a price 'per participant' cost.

This spread sheet shows the impact of fixed costs: with two participants the cost is \$119 but with 20 participants the cost is \$29. Here a minimum of eight clients is required to be cost-neutral.

The selling price is based on what the market is currently prepared to pay. Check similar tours in your area to ascertain current prices. Once the selling price is determined, the spreadsheet multiplies it by the number of participants and subtracts the commission of 25 per cent. Then the cost of running the activity is subtracted leaving the profit. The spreadsheet shows that when selling at \$65, to cross the profit line, albeit marginally, at least eight paying participants are required.

The more involved the ecotour, the more involved the spreadsheet becomes. The spreadsheet requires you to break the activity down into its component parts and helps to highlight sections that you have failed to cover. It also provides an opportunity to look at each component to assess if it is the best way to achieve the desired results.

TOURISM INDUSTRY DISTRIBUTION NETWORK

To make your ecotours accessible to the public you will need to consider the tourism industry distribution network. While an ecotour operator can always sell the ecotour direct to customers, it may be beneficial to use the travel industry to extend market penetration. These include retail travel agents, wholesalers and inbound tour operators.

It is important for an ecotour operator to see these agents as part of their business and not some form of impost. If the operator can fill tours from direct bookings, there is no need to use other marketing distribution methods, such as agents, at any level. But if the operator has spare capacity, it is worth 'topping up' the loading with business gained through agents rather than having empty seats. Eighty per cent of your price is better than 100 per cent of nothing!

The agents already have established networks, which might cost operators much more to develop on their own, especially in the international sector. The commissions can, therefore, be weighed up against the cost of doing your own marketing into these areas.

Retail Agents

The term 'retail agent' refers to retail travel agents and other outlets that sell travel products like ecotours directly to the public. Retail agents may include tourist bureaux; accommodation places like bed and breakfast houses, caravan parks, chalets and resorts; attractions like museums, wineries and theme parks; ecotour operators; and others in a region who deal with the public.

Retail agents generate bookings for ecotours by promoting them either individually or as part of a larger program and selling the tickets. Each ecotour sold commands a commission of at least 10 per cent of the retail price as a booking fee. Ecotour operators are obliged to charge the customer the same price as the retail agents.

Retail agents should be well briefed about ecotour products. Operators often encourage them to participate in the ecotour product so they have first-hand knowledge of what the client will be purchasing. Ecotour operators may offer this free of charge or at a discount rate if, when the bookings are made, there are seats or space available. Additionally, operators may conduct a familiarisation session for agents, send regular newsletters, make 'sales calls' and ensure that they have current brochures and rates. Above all, ecotour operators must be able to respond to a retail agent's request promptly and be easily contactable.21

Wholesalers

Wholesalers do not sell ecotours directly to customers. Instead wholesalers act as the link between ecotour operators and retail agents who deal directly with the public. Wholesalers package various components of a holiday including accommodation, travel and ecotours which are then sold to customers through retail agents.

The wholesaler may be an organisation such as a resort, promotions group, large airline, regional tourism association or government department that initiates a program incorporating several ecotour operators within a promotional format such as a brochure. The wholesaler confirms all details with the operators when designing publicity. The pay rates for space in a wholesaler's brochures are generally reasonable compared with the cost an individual operator would have to pay to reach such a large market.22 Some wholesalers do not charge for space in brochures but will generally charge a higher commission.

Wholesalers will expect ecotour operators to be covered by public liability insurance, have permits to access protected areas if applicable, have the appropriate equipment, be familiar with the activity/area and if possible provide a 'dry run' for the wholesaler's representative to ensure a quality activity. Wholesalers rarely promote a product that does not have a proven track record.23

The wholesaler's responsibility to the operators is to ensure that the promotional information is accurate, the program is advertised as widely as possible, that bookings are taken correctly and operators/guides are informed of bookings so that activities proceed smoothly. In addition, the wholesaler may coordinate the evaluation of ecotour programs.

A wholesaler works for a commission which is the difference between what the agent gives them and what they pay to the operator. However, nothing is paid to a wholesaler unless bookings are made. Wholesalers may use a formula of 10 per cent commission by retail agent, 15 per cent commission by the wholesaler and 75 per cent takings by the operator, but this formula can have a variety of combinations.

For example:

- Customer purchases ecotour ticket for \$65.
- Tourist bureau (a retail agent) sends \$58.50 to the wholesaler and retains the \$6.50 (10 per cent) as commission.
- The wholesaler then processes the booking and retains a further commission, \$9.75 (15 per cent).
- The ecotour operator receives the booking information and the balance of \$48.75 (75 per cent of retail price).

^{21.} Tourism Marketing Guide, WATC, June 1998, p. 22 22. Tourism Marketing Guide, WATC, June 1998, p. 24 23. Tourism Marketing Guide, WATC, June 1998 p. 23

General Sales Agents

A general sales agent (GSA) is an agent who operates as a wholesaler, within a specified area, for your product. The GSA will service the travel agents within their area and be responsible for taking all the bookings from them before passing them onto you as the operator. The GSA takes a higher commission for this, normally between 20 and 25 per cent. The GSA has to pay a commission, normally 10 to 15 per cent, to the retail agent out of their commission.

The advantages of this are that the operator can reach and service a much larger range of agents, and other opportunities, such as being included in brochures and attending travel shows and other promotional activities. A positive relationship needs to be developed with the GSA so your product is presented well and the information sent out and received is accurate. Other benefits include being able to leave most of the general enquiries and bookings to the GSA and allowing the operator to get on with operating the tour. This comes at a cost which is the higher commission plus the perception of losing some control.

Table 10 is a sample timetable of a summer program of ecotours marketed through a wholesaler, which in this example is a resort in the Karri forest in the south-west of Western Australia.

Inbound Tour Operators

Inbound tour operators (ITOs) promote and sell Australian travel packages to buyers outside Australia. These buyers are overseas based wholesalers, retail travel agents, meeting planners and event managers. They also play a key role as tourism 'brokers' for overseas travel companies, providing a wide range of services including advice on product, price and availability, coordination of travel arrangements and payments and supervision of product delivery.

The skill of the ITOs is to understand the interests, needs and cultures of overseas markets and to keep well informed of available Australian tourism product. They stay abreast of new or existing ecotour products through trade fairs and suppliers workshops where they meet with ecotour operators on a scheduled appointment basis and may participate in pre- and post-workshop touring. For such occasions, it is important to focus on the competitive advantage of your ecotours that inbound tour operators will be able to sell overseas. Concentrate on keeping your message simple.

Be aware that there can be up to a two year delay from the time an ITO or similar agent agrees to promote in print a program to the time the clients actually appear on site. Work out your costs to include this potential delay. Possible rises in park fees, food and so on can affect the bottom line. To ensure customer satisfaction with the delivery of an ecotour product, the promotion must be genuine. The onus is on ecotour operators to ensure that promotion is accurate and in no way misleading. Unfortunately, litigation for false advertising is already a reality in Australia.

In addition, ITOs attend overseas trade workshops and travel shows where they can provide international exposure for Australian ecotour products.

Inbound tour operators are best accessed through their professional associations. The Inbound Tourism Organisation of Australia (ITOA) is based in Sydney and has branches in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania

Year	Wholesaler	Ecotour Operator	Retail Agents	State and Regional Event
July	Write objectives.			School holidays, Wildflower Festival
August	Contact and confirm operator activities. Brochure design and production. Design and print ticket books.	Staff training 'Dry runs' of activities		
September	Contact retailers, eg. tourist bureaux, accommodation places. Distribute brochures via mail, personal delivery, media advertisements. Conduct media and retail agents famils.	Collect props for activities	Obtain necessary information on ecotours from the wholesaler; attend a famil.	Car Rally
October	Promotions and media advertisements		Promote and sell ecotour program with customers.	Blues Festival
November	Establish booking sheets. Promotions and media advertisements Contact local and regional schools.)	as above	
December	Booking system functioning: selling tickets, completing bookings and contacting operators on dally basis. Liaise with retailers. Conduct retailer famils. Promotions and media advertisements. Photograph activities.	Conducting ecotours	as above	School holidays
January	Booking system functioning: selling tickets, completing bookings and contacting operators on daily basis. Lialse with retailers. Promotions and media advertisements. Photograph activities.	Conducting ecotours		School holidays, Australia Day
February	Program evaluation. Start planning for next program, eg. Autumn, Spring.	Review ecotour evaluations and surveys and revamp ecotours as appropri		
March				Speedway Open Club Championships, Yacht Regatta, Pioneer Golf Weekend
April				Easter, School holldays, Easter Sunday Markets
Мау				Folk Dance Festival New Homes Expo

and South Australia. In Western Australia, the Western Australia Inbound Tourism Operators Association (WAITOA) provides essentially the same services.

Contact:

Inbound Tourism Organisation of Australia

Level 2, 80 William Street

Woolloomooloo, NSW 2011

Ph: 02 9360 5955 Fax: 02 9332 3383

Western Australian Inbound Tourism Operators Association Inc.

Secretariat PO Box 335

Leederville, WA 6903

Ph: 08 9380 9394

Fax: 08 9380 9345

E-mail: msimson@echidna.id.au

BOOKING CUSTOMERS

There are a number of ways that an operator may obtain bookings:

- Direct from the client as a result of the operators own marketing
- From another tour operator linking with your tour
- From a retailer (local booking office such as a tourist bureau)
- From a wholesaler who has included your tour as part of planned itinerary
- From an inbound operator who has included your tour as part of a planned itinerary
- A mixture of all the above

Make sure that your booking system can accommodate the requirements of each method of obtaining bookings.

Direct Booking

Ensure that there is a method of receiving the booking (usually by phone). See that either someone is there to take the details or you have an answering machine with a clear message describing what information you need from the client to make the booking.

Information required would include:

Name and numbers of clients

Contact details

Date tour required

If your tour has a limited capacity (eg can only take 10 passengers on the tour) then make sure you keep a good record of the numbers booked on each tour so that you don't over-book.

Another Tour Operator

This is very similar to the direct booking but it will usually involve a group and it may require an exclusive tour. The information should be worked out before hand during the negotiation including net rate which you expect to be paid from that operator.



From a Retailer

If you choose to have a single booking agency to handle your booking; no doubt they will already have their own booking system developed. You should ensure that there is a good communication system set up between them and yourselves so that they can provide the appropriate information on numbers booked etc in a timely fashion depending on the special requirements of your tour (eg catering or providing equipment). Payment will be from the retailer who will provide the passenger with a voucher or ticket and you will normally get paid once a month less the appropriate commission.

From a Wholesaler

You may wish to expand your marketing activities by including your product in a wholesale brochure. The most common form of this is to be included in a Free & Independent Traveller's (FIT) itinerary grouped with other services such as transport, accommodation and other tours.

The wholesaler's brochure is distributed to a large number of retailers who will use the already established booking system set up between themselves and the wholesaler. When your tour, or an itinerary, which includes your tour, is booked, the retailer advises the wholesaler and the wholesaler will advise you using their already established booking system. Now days this is usually done electronically or by fax. What information you will receive will have been established when negotiating your arrangement with the wholesaler prior to entering into their program.

Once again, you must ensure that you have a system set up to receive and record the information as it comes in as bookings may arrive with different lead times.

Wholesalers will provide the passengers (via the retailer) with vouchers that you will need to account for with the wholesaler usually on a monthly basis.

From an Inbound Operator

This is usually very similar to working with a wholesaler.

All of the Above

Where you receive your booking by a combination of any or all of the above, the secret is to establish a good communication system with them and make sure that they are knowledgeable about your product. This especially applies to tours that are limited by capacity to ensure that you do not over-book or it makes it difficult for booking agents to book your tour.

Ensure that their timeframes of notifying you of the booking will suit your operation. While the tour may arrive as a group, they may be an amalgamation of FIT's booked over a long period of time.

Where you use the different levels of distribution you have what's called a "Market Mix." Because you will be paying various levels of commission you will need to look at the effect of this "Market Mix" on your pricing structure.

The other thing to be very aware of is your cash flow. The deeper you go into the marketing process the longer it may be that you get paid. It is not unusual for inbound operators to pay in 1 - 3 months time because they are waiting for payments from overseas. When negotiating with any booking agent, make sure you establish clearly what are the terms of payments.

Table 11. A Booking Chart for an Ecotour

► Date	
Time	
Ecotour Operator	
Departure point	
Tour code - reference number	eg. 1201GEOGC/1 (date - '1201' 12 Jan, operator - 'GEO' for Generic Ecotour Operator, activity - 'GC' for 'Goin' Up the Country', '/1' one ticket sold)
Minimum and maximum number	rs
 number of adults or children, contact telephone number, booked by which agen ticket number, 	nt,
cost and operator paid	
	the activities and space for alterations that agents allergies to food, change in departure point, etc.

ROMOTING AN ECOTOUR PROGRAM

Having determined your target audiences and created an ecotour product based on the objectives in your business plan, the next consideration is a strategy to promote your product. Promotion involves getting the right messages out about your product and encouraging the right people to buy it.

Each State and Territory tourism organisation employs marketing professionals who can recommend appropriate promotional tools. They also produce printed information about 'cooperative promotion' opportunities at both the national and international level, 'event tourism' as well as 'convention' and 'incentive' travel. Their marketing strategies include *travel industry awareness* such as participating in a familiarisation or a supplier workshop, consumer awareness such as taking advertising space in selected industry brochures and *incremental business*, such as participating in cooperative tactical advertising campaigns which promote specific 'price and product' holiday offers.²⁴

FAMILIARISATION SESSIONS

Probably the best opportunity to showcase your ecotourism products to those who will be selling it directly to your clients is through familiarisation sessions, known as 'famils', which are usually on site demonstrations of your product. This is the opportunity for you and your staff to present your product to a captive audience of retail and other tourism agents. While this is the ideal way of displaying your wares, it is not always possible to achieve the attendance you desire. Demand for agents' time is very high and sometimes the hard work you put into a famil appears lost because, for a variety of reasons, you end up having a poor turn out. The key here is perseverance. Don't give up and don't write off agents who may prove to be valuable contacts down the track.

Most State government travel centres offer licensed ecotour operators the chance to formally register their products and be entered on a tourism database (which may include a web site). Publicity materials for registered products may be displayed at the centres and bookings taken on a commission basis. Registered operators may also be informed of other in-house promotional opportunities such as tearoom session briefings. These are quick and casual opportunities for representatives of a particular region to pitch their product to a travel centre.

^{24.} Partnership to Success: A Guide to the WATC's Cooperative Opportunities for 1998/1999, 1998, pp 10-36

Registration information is available at the State Government Travel Centres and Tourism Commissions:

Northern Territory Holiday Centre

PO Box 2532

Alice Springs, NT 0871 Free call: 1800 621 336 Internet: www.nttc.com.au

■ New South Wales Tourist Bureau

19 Castlereagh St Sydney, NSW 2000 Free call: 132 077

Internet: www.tourism.nsw.gov.au

- 9
- Queensland Government Travel Centre Shop 6, 777 Hay Street Perth, WA 6000 Local call: 08 9322 1777

Internet: www.queensland.com.au

■ Western Australian Tourist Centre

Forrest Place (cnr Wellington St)

Perth, WA 6000 Free call: 1300 361 351

Internet: www.westernaustralia.net

South Australian Tourist Centre

1st Floor, Wesley Arcade

93 William St Perth, WA 6000

Free call: 1300 366 770 Local call: (08) 9481 1268

Internet: www.tourism.sa.gov.au

Canberra Tourist Bureau

Northbourne Ave Dickson, ACT 2601

Free call: 1800 026 166

Internet: www.canberra.region.com.au/index

One method for building travel industry awareness is via the Visiting Journalists Program (VJP). This Media Trade Awareness Program, organised in Australia through the Australian Tourist Commission, provides highly qualified journalists from all over the world an opportunity to experience Australian tourism products first-hand. These are known as media familiarisations (famils) which are theme-based and are coordinated by State and Territory tourism commissions.

In 1996/97 alone the publicity generated from the VJP exceeded \$675 million. Depending on the theme for the year, ecotour operators may be invited to be involved by providing sponsorship for media personnel visiting Australia. The cost to ecotour operators is comparatively minimal – it may simply involve an invitation to experience an ecotour on a discounted or free of charge basis.²⁵

Another marketing opportunity may be had through the use of mailing lists. You can purchase contact details of international wholesalers, trade show attendees and consumers from the Australian Tourist Commission.

As well as promoting your product to the overseas market, think about potential regional wholesalers such as government parks agencies and agents such as tourist bureaux, resorts, accommodation places and regional attractions. More information on ecotour promotion may be obtained by contacting the relevant State and Territory tourism organisations.

■ Northern Territory Tourism Commission 3rd-4th Floor, Tourism House 43 Mitchell St PO Box 1155 Darwin, NT 0801 Ph: 08 8999 3900 Fax: 08 8999 3888

Internet: www.nttc.com.au

■ Tourism New South Wales 55 Harrington St, The Rocks Sydney, NSW 2000 Ph: 02 9931 1111 Fax: 02 9931 1490

Internet: www.tourism.nsw.gov.au

Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation Commission 36th Floor, 123 Eagle St (GPO Box 328) Brisbane, QLD 4001 Ph: 07 3406 5400 Fax: 07 3406 5436

Internet: www.qttc.com.au

■ Canberra Tourism Commission Locked Bag 2001 Civic Square, ACT 2601 Ph: 02 6205 0666 Fax: 02 6205 0629

Email: canberra_tourism@dpa.act.gov.au Internet: www.canberratourism.com.au

Australian Tourist Commission 3rd Floor, 80 William St Woolloomooloo, NSW 2011 (GPO Box 2721) (Sydney, NSW 2001)

Ph: 1300 361650 Fax: 02 9331 6469

Internet: www.atc.net.au

Western Australian Tourism Commission 6th Floor, 16 St George's Terrace Perth, WA 6000 Ph: 08 9220 1700 Fax: 08 9220 1702 Email: welcome@tourism.wa.gov.au Internet: www.wa.gov.au/watc

■ Tourism Victoria 7th Floor, 55 Collins St GPO Box 2219T Melbourne, VIC 3001 Ph: 03 9653 9777 Fax: 03 9653 9755

Internet: www.tourism.vic.gov.au

■ South Australian Tourism Commission 7th-8th Floor, 178 North Terrace (GPO Box G1972) Adelaide, SA 5001 Ph: 08 8303 2222 Fax: 08 8303 2295 Internet: www.tourism.sa.gov.au

■ Tourism Tasmania Trafalgar Centre, 110 Collins St (GPO Box 399) Hobart, TAS 7001 Ph: 03 6230 8169, 03 6230 8235 Fax: 03 6230 8365 Internet: www.tourism.tas.gov.au

■ Tourism Council Australia Level 17, 100 William St Woolloomooloo, NSW 2011 (PO Box 646)

(Kings Cross, NSW 2011) Ph: 02 9358 6055

Fax: 02 9358 6188

Internet: www.tourism.org.au

METHODS OF PROMOTION

The only 'free' method of promotion is word of mouth, but unless you put dollars and effort into other methods you can't expect people to say what you want them to about your ecotours. Consider these types of promotion to make consumers aware of your product.

Promotions with minimal cost or solely the cost of your time

TV programs with environmental and travel themes - great if you can score a spot for your ecotour on holiday and travel shows. This usually demands a unique or very unusual product. However, persistence can pay off; getting to air may be a long term project.

Radio spots/community radio - talking on radio can be a fun and quick way of getting information out about a special program.

Community newspaper – write an article and provide a photo for a community newspaper. Items like these are often printed with little or no revision. You can benefit from the use of community newspaper articles in two ways.

- They can spread local knowledge and awareness of your product. Photos are essential to bring it to life. Try to include a local celebrity or Member of Parliament - they always want publicity.
- They can help spread awareness further afield. Use 'outsiders', that is, people from other areas who have participated. Take publicity photos and submit them to their local newspapers.

City newspapers - these often carry travel features. Invite a journalist on your tour in return for preparing an article.

Photographs of activities - produce a photo album as a reference for a wholesaler and to accompany any media release.

Door knock your local accommodation places. Hostels and Backpackers require 10 per cent commission and generally require pick up and drop off but they may be good sources of clients, depending on the product. If the product is up-market, visit the concierges at all the local hotels. Appointments are usually hard to come by but leaving eye-catching brochures is essential.

Promotions board, blackboard, whiteboard, pin-up or sandwich board placed in popular places - easy to update and useful at camping areas or other accommodation centres where people are often looking for interesting outdoor activities.



Promotions with cost

Joint promotional campaigns - these help to maximise promotional dollars. Get involved with joint promotional campaigns, for instance, with other ecotour operators, tourism associations or land and water management authorities.26 Several tour operators might join forces with or without a wholesaler or ITO and co-produce advertising material for their different programs or develop a composite program using elements of individual programs. Regional Tourism Associations can help here.

Printed leaflets and brochures (A4 size, 210 mm x 297 mm, or DL size, 210 mm x 100 mm, both of which fit in standard size envelopes)

Posters (A4 to A3 sizes)

Direct Mail - forwarding brochures through mailing lists, tourist bureaux, accommodation places within the region, magazine or newsletter subscribers

Advertisements in tourism promotional publications. Each State or Territory's tourism commission publishes a list of their promotional activities both nationally and internationally for each year. This includes the costs of the various options from which you may choose.

Advertisements in newspapers - consider placing advertisements in the 'What's on' section of newspapers or the classified section, or display advertisements in the travel pages of newspapers (more expensive than classified ads but can be good source of business for smaller operators).27

Advertisements in related magazines and publications. People looking for unusual natural experiences in Australia and overseas can find information in nature, travel and lifestyle magazines. Often there is a section devoted specifically to advertisements for environmental activities and opportunities.

Attending/speaking at conferences. Travel conferences and trade fairs are excellent venues to let potential clients know about your ecotour products. Whether you present a paper or staff a booth you are out there being seen and letting wholesalers, retail agents, potential clients and others know what you offer. As these can be expensive, it is worth keeping in touch with your local State tourism organisation for assistance.

Inviting students to conduct research with your business. Students working toward post graduate degrees are always looking for research projects that are specific, manageable and have a genuine relationship to the world outside academic institutions.





Nature Based Tourism Strategy for WA. Report. 1997
 Tourism Marketing Gulde, WATC, June 1998, p. 28



Sponsorship

Don't rule out the possibility of sponsorship of your ecotours by companies and businesses with a similar ethic such as environmental resorts, camping shops, bush tucker vendors, scouting associations. Work out ways whereby you can all benefit by working in partnership. Contributions can be as funds, products or services.

Community and business networking. Invite as many people as possible to participate. Word of mouth is still one of the best ways of selling. Consider joining the local convention bureau. Business networking through overseas Chambers of Commerce can be very effective (for example, Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Indonesian Chamber of Commerce). Be careful not to join too many professional associations all at once. It's better to have a couple of memberships working for you. Spend time making contacts and building relationships rather than going to one function a year run by five different associations.

In addition to standard methods of promotion, it pays to think creatively about how to get information on your product into the hands of potential customers, and how to make your product memorable after the event as well.

For instance, perhaps you could make arrangements to have your brochures placed in the gloveboxes of rental cars, distributed by local nature associations and advertised in camping and outdoor shops. You might develop a display about ecotours for an airport waiting area. Consider developing special merchandise such as caps, tee-shirts, tea-towels, mugs or a bush cookbook featuring your distinctive tour logo or an attractive environmental image which could be offered for sale to your clients. Be sure to make merchandise functional so that it will be seen and used.

As an ecotour operator, certain ethics and responsibilities are expected of you. Ensure your promotions fit within your ethics and don't promote unacceptable behaviours and practices. Your tours are likely to be judged by the way you promote them. For instance, if you don't use recycled paper, overuse paper in brochures, or distribute publicity unwisely, such as placing an advertising board in an inappropriate natural area or having people standing on street corners distributing handbills, these methods may reflect poorly on the genuineness of your ecotour business.

PRODUCING A BROCHURE

A printed brochure is a basic but effective tool to publicise something intangible like an ecotour. It allows you to visually represent your product through enticing photos and/or illustrations. You can also choose the wording carefully and determine the 'look' you want for a brochure so that potential clients get an instant and positive image of your product. Spend some time looking at the brochures of other ecotourism products on the market and decide what you like and don't like about them. Pay close attention to what makes them appealing and how they will be displayed. Look for what motivates rather than just informs.

The size and form of the brochure will depend on the nature of the ecotours you will be running. Keep your formatting consistent or in the same theme with other printed material used by your business - use the same font, colours and choice of words to create a 'business signature'. Or, if you are doing a cooperative advertisement, ensure that your logo appears in the promotional product.

It is worthwhile to use the talents of a professional graphic designer for your brochures. You'll also need professional copy (the words which will be set in type) and photographs and/or illustrations. It is worth the effort to put a rough draft brochure together yourself (stick figures are fine) so you can discuss with greater clarity what you are after with the professionals. Because dates and prices may alter from time to time, consider printing an inexpensive flyer with this information that can be inserted into your brochures.

Details of each activity in the program should include:

- Name of operator
- Descriptive title of ecotour make sure it is clear but enticing as to what is on offer.
- Short description of the ecotour
- Who the ecotour is designed for whether it caters for children, families or adults with active or passive involvement
- Age limit if applicable
- The dates it will be conducted
- Time of the event and departure or pick up points
- Ecotour duration and finish times
- Cost per participant
- Place of departure which should also be indicated on the location map
- Items necessary for clients to bring along

Additional information on the brochure should include:

- Booking and payment details
- General information and map of the local area
- Contact telephone number for more details, booking and ticket sales requirements

- A daily, weekly or monthly ecotour publication for clients to view at a glance as sometimes all the written information can appear overwhelming. A summary of the activities may encourage clients to look at them in more detail.
- Maximum and minimum numbers (optional)

Show your draft information to people who have little or no knowledge of the ecotour to gauge their reaction and understanding of the product and how to access it. Be sure to ask at least three people to review the final draft to catch potential mis-spellings or other errors.

For your initial ecotour promotion, prepare and have your brochures ready at least six months before the program or ecotour begins. This will allow time for exposure and for local businesses to incorporate it into their holiday planning. For example, accommodation places taking bookings for the season can notify their potential guests as to what is happening in the area at the time of their intended visit. Planning and promoting well ahead can allow the ecotours to be included in events calendars produced for the various regions. Develop a promotion plan at least one year ahead.

SAMPLE PROMOTION PLAN: GOIN' UP THE COUNTRY

Product: A day tour for English speaking overseas adult visitors to experience natural, historic and cultural values from Fremantle to The Hills Forest east of Perth. Transport will be provided to tourists from major hotels and backpacking accommodation places.

Background: This ecotour is designed for visitors to Perth who want to discover areas close to, but outside, the city precinct. The idea is to link natural and built areas near the Metropolis with less developed areas and bush reserves further afield.

Place/Distribution Method: Retail agents, local tourism commission and centres, inbound tour operators, travel wholesalers, Bed and Breakfasts in the Perth-Fremantle area.

Price: The cost of the ecotour will be \$65 per person.

Cost of Production: The cost of conducting the ecotour on a daily basis is \$220 plus variable costs depending on number of participants.

The minimum number of clients necessary for each ecotour is eight (see Table 9). The maximum that can be carried by the minibus is 20. The minimum gross takings for one day (one ecotour) is \$520; \$1300 is the maximum gross takings.

Promotion Objectives:

- Promote Goin' Up the Country so that it is known as an enticing tourist option for overseas and interstate visitors to Perth.
- Promote Goin' Up the Country so that it becomes widely known as a quality ecotour by relevant accommodation places, tourist bureaux, major attractions and resorts.
- Sell 1000 tickets during the first season.

Target Audiences: Target promotion to overseas, interstate and intrastate visitors to Perth.

Promotion (also see Timeline in Table 12): Promotion will be an ongoing process for approximately two years by which time a target of 1000 paying

Table 12. An Ecotour Promotion Timeline

(fill in 🗱 and ticks as appropriate)

Promotional Activities 1999–2000	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Notes	Cost estimate
	Mar	Apr	Мау	Jun	Jul	Aug Sept 2000(♥)	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb		
Preliminary promotion to inbound tourism operators (ITOs) by phone/informal discussion at professional association meetings	×												\$20
Print fliers of basic info for ITOs,			×										
Prepare presentation information for suppliers workshops for ITOs.	×												
Present information about ecotour at suppliers workshops for ITOs.			*					_				Book in for supplier desk space and registration	\$60
Organise for 'Goin' Up the Country' brochures (once printed) to be placed in Perth rental car gloveboxes.				V								Contact rental car agencies	fee to be determined
Prepare copy and graphics material for colour brochures.						×							
Print colour brochures.											V	Print 10,000	\$2000
Distribute brochures to ITOs, Perth region, Western Australian Royal Automobile Club, accommodation places, libraries, tourist bureaux, WA resorts and WA EcoMuseums. Make personal sales calls to retail travel agents, inbound tour operators, tour wholesalers, etc.	V				1								
Place advertisements in The West Australian travel pages.		V											
Register interest with the Western Australian Tourism Commission for the Media and Trade Awareness Program; supply WATC with ecotour information.													
Arrange for manufacture of ecotour memento.	V												

clients will have participated in the ecotour. Promotion will target inbound tour operators, Perth region accommodation places, Western Australian tourist bureaux, Western Australian resorts, attractions and shops with an environmental focus.

Promotion will include distribution of a full colour brochure, flyers, radio spots and newspaper advertisements (The West Australian and the Sunday Times).

Every opportunity will be taken to inform telephone callers responding to the promotional campaign about the value and quality of Goin' Up the Country. When requests come for information clients will be asked where they heard of the ecotour and a record kept.

Packaging: Full colour brochures; ecotour memento which is an attractively printed gourmet wattle seed recipe and small quantity of wattle seeds (commercially available) in a cloth bag screen-printed with an Aboriginal design and ecotour operator's logo.

Partnerships: Organise overseas promotion with Perth inbound tour operators, local promotion through CALM's tourist information shop WA Naturally and co-sponsor publicity with other local tour operators.

People: The staff of all associated agencies who may speak to potential clients about Goin' Up the Country will be informed of all relevant particulars and encouraged to attend the ecotour at a discount rate so that they can relate the experience first-hand.

'Goin' up the Country' Ecotour Guided activities for experiencing natural. historic & cultural values of The Hills Forest and it's surrounds 29th June 1998 Department of Conservation and Land Management University of Notre Dame Australia

Ensure your promotion plan accords with the goals and budget outlined in your original business plan. Once you have a final draft, check it out with your local government tourism organisation. Make notes of all feedback for reference when you are ready to finalise your plan.

Because the process of marketing and promotion is an ongoing one which can have a major impact on your finances, it requires thorough monitoring. Keeping a record of all sales and where they generated will assist in determining where future promotional dollars should be directed.

VALUATING ECOTOUR GUIDES AND PROGRAMS

Ecotour guides play a fundamental role in tourist satisfaction and are often in the front-line of protecting the natural and cultural resources on which ecotourism depends. Knowing how your ecotour stacks up in the eyes of your clients is a key to monitoring your business performance.

For your monitoring to be successful, it should be planned at the same time as you plan the program – determining the methods you will use, and taking into account that some methods may require additional resources.

GAINING FEEDBACK FOR EVALUATION

There are three methods of obtaining feedback which will help determine if clients received your interpretive messages. They are:

- i) self assessment;
- ii) peer assessment; and
- iii) client feedback.

It is strongly recommended that you apply all three methods and consider the results from three perspectives. The following focus is directed primarily at guide assessment and day tours.

Self assessment includes considering immediate feedback received during the activity such as smiles, questions, responses and participation. Self evaluation also includes checking to see if your objectives were achieved. Audio or video taping of activities can help you note where improvements may be needed.

Here is a sample self assessment checklist to help guides focus on different areas of audience impact (Table 13).







Table 13. A Self assessment checklist

	SELF ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST
Prep	paration
	Review the principles of interpretive communication
	Complete the interpretive activities planner (IAP)
	Review the IAP with a professional colleague
	Analyse and assess the site
	Prepare props and equipment
Ц	Arrive at site early (15 minutes or more, depending on the site preparation requirements
닏	Welcome participants and get to know a little about why they are attending
	See to any onsite, last minute adminstrative needs (toilets, water, first aid, telephone, etc)
The	Activity
	Introduce yourself
_	Arrange group for best group dynamics and comfort (considering sun, seating, noise, space and be sure to note numbers of people, ages, etc on the Interpretive Activity Planner evaluation section)
ш	Focus visually and orally on the whole group (move eyes and head around to include all individuals)
	Don't allow your attention to be dominated by a few personalities
	Look for feedback from the group
	Conclusion - summarise what you did and state primary message
	Say 'thank you' for visitor's participation
	Hand out Participant Survey Forms
Retro	ospective
	See to any onsite responsibilities (minimum impact etc.)
	Complete the self evaluation section of IAP
	Read Participant Survey Forms
	Modify IAP and nate required changes to presentation

Peer evaluation may include using an observer to monitor group responses, using a supervisor as an assessor and/or debriefing with colleagues.

Here is a sample peer assessment checklist (Table 14) to help peers focus on different aspects of a guide's presentation.

Table 14. An Ecotour Guide Evaluation Checklist

PEER ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST FOR ECOTOUR GUIDE EVALUATION

	Evaluator:
	Ecotour guide:
	Ecotour title:
	Date, time and weather:
	Locality:
	Number attending the activity:
	Age groups:
	(Tick each component you considered in assessing the activity leader and make notes required for further discussion or comment. For certain items write 'not applicable' if appropriate.)
The	Presentation
▶ B	defore: (The ecotour guide)
	arrived early/started on time
Ц	checked props
	welcomed clients as they arrive
	interacted with clients before activity
	professional demeanour and appearance
▶ [During: (The ecotour guide)
	introduced self
Ц	provided orientation to the area, facilities, constraints
Ш	introduced activity by title, theme/message
	announced type of activity and expectations
	considered group dynamics and comfort
	focused on whole group

maintained audience attention
generated discussion from activity
appropriate level of comprehension by group
interesting use of language
volume and clarity of voice
enthusiasm
► After: (The ecotour guide)
concluded the activity reinforcing the message
thanked clients
promoted other activities to clients
remained available to answer questions
The Experience
► Presentation
dynamic
controlled/measured/paced
dull/laconic
anxious/nervous
other
▶ Demonstration
used props as focal points
clear description of function of prop
clear observation of function of prop
other
► Participation
encouraged conservation contribution
demonstrated minimal impact
encouraged proper behaviour
monitored group behaviour

encouraged clients' responses and enquiries asked questions provided opportunity for group discussion clients actively involved in activity (things to do/role to play) responded to feedback from group balanced individuation and group needs resolution of group conflict reacted appropriately to unexpected situations other Variety of stimuli visual auditory words/symbols actions Appeal to various ways of learning within the group Innovative (why - the personal perspective)	
provided opportunity for group discussion	
clients actively involved in activity (things to do/role to play) responded to feedback from group balanced individuation and group needs resolution of group conflict reacted appropriately to unexpected situations other Variety of stimuli visual auditory words/symbols actions Appeal to various ways of learning within the group	
responded to feedback from group	
balanced individuation and group needs	
resolution of group conflict	
reacted appropriately to unexpected situations other Variety of stimuli visual auditory words/symbols actions Appeal to various ways of learning within the group	
variety of stimuli visual auditory words/symbols actions Appeal to various ways of learning within the group	
Variety of stimuli visual auditory words/symbols actions Appeal to various ways of learning within the group	
visual auditory words/symbols actions Appeal to various ways of learning within the group	
auditory words/symbols actions Appeal to various ways of learning within the group	
words/symbols actions Appeal to various ways of learning within the group	
words/symbols actions Appeal to various ways of learning within the group	
Appeal to various ways of learning within the group	
Appeal to various ways of learning within the group	
analytical (what - the facts)	
practical (how - do it)	
dynamic (what if - creative response)	
Appeal to the whole person	
the senses	
imagination	
physical activity	
talking and listening	
feelings	
thinking	
concentrating	

A TOTAL CONTRACTOR OF THE PARTY						
smiles, laughter						
applause						_
questions						
compliments						
_	none	some	half	most	all	
attentiveness	1	2	3	4	5	
participation and involvement	- 1	2	3	4	5	
(negative)						
dgeting, lack of attention		yes		no		
de conversations		yes		no		
ck of eye contact		yes		no		
aving		yes		no		
omplaints		yes		no		
(rating)	35.45	34a4	510c	22.707	- 11	
ient interaction	none 1	some 2	half 3	most 4	all 5	
terest shown in surroundings	1	2	3	4	5	
	•		- 2		(2)	
ow could the activity be improved?						
						_
						_
ther comments						

CLIENT FEEDBACK FORM

Please take a few moments to answer these questions. Your answers will help the company and the guide to improve this ecotour. We don't need your name or address; all answers will be treated confidentially.

200	No.		1		10.000	in the block	and the same	one is a second to the
	otour title:				other pe		nend this compan	y/tour operator to
Gu	de:				no	probably	definitely	unsure
Co	mpany:			-	2, Your E	cotour Gu	lde	
Loc	cation:				Please o	circle the res	ponse that is most	appropriate for
Dat	re;				conduc		ou with the way y vities? (eg. was it i	
•	1. Your Ecotour			311				400
	Please circle the response the you.	nat is most appro	opriate for	21	very dis		dissatisfied unsure	satisfied
	I How satisfied are you with you visited)?	the ecotour itin	erary (places		I How so (eg. wa	atisfied are y	you with the way y id enough and at	
	very dissatisfied dissat	isfied	atisfied		speed?)		
	very satisfied unsure	9			very dis	satisfied	dissatisfied	satisfied
	How satisfied are you with	the length of the	e ecotour?		very sat	isfled	unsure	
	very dissatisfied dissati	1,122	atisfied		membe	rs were enco	ou with the extend ouraged to contrib	t to which ecotour oute and
	■ How satisfied are you with	the food provid	ed on the	Ш	particip	are?		
	ecotour? (if applicable)				very dis		dissatisfied	satisfied
	very dissatisfied dissat	isfied s	atisfied		very sat	isfied	unsure	
	very satisfied unsure		atto a		appropr	iate behavi	ou with what the our? (eg. minimal	
	How satisfied are you with provided on the ecotour? (it		allon		negativ	e impacts o	n local cultures)	
	very dissatisfied dissat	isfied s	atisfied		very dis		dissatisfied	satisfied
	very satisfied unsure	777		21	very sat	istled	unsure	
	■ How satisfied are you with that was included in the eco		nformation		appropr	late behavi	ou with what the our? (eg, monitorli a good example)	
	too little just right	too much	unsure		very diss	satisfied	dissatisfied	satisfied
	■ How satisfied are you with	the type of info	rmation that		very sat	isfled	unsure	
	was presented?		100				ou with your guid	e's suggestions or ervation activities?
	too simplistic just right How satisfied are you with	too technical	unsure			ing a conse	rvation organisation	
			77.4-1		very dis	satisfied	dissatisfied	satisfied
	very dissatisfied dissativery satisfied unsur		atisfied		very sat		unsure	3,211,110.2
	How satisfied are you that (ie. that the four was a fair p	you got value fo	or money?				articular your guid g or useful?	e said or did which
	very dissatisfied dissa	tisfied s	atisfied					
	very satisfied unsur		CINICO					
	Would you book another e tour operator?	ecotour with this	company/	- V	Vas there a	ovthing in n	articular that you f	elt was left out?
	no probably	definitely	unsure		. 34	.,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,	2	an magneti vari
	■ Would you book another e	ecotour with the	guide you	-				
		definitely	unsure					

In your view, what was	me message or this	s ecoloni,		Have you ever been on an ecotour or nature-based tour before?
				Yes, once before Yes, more than once No, first time
you would like to comr ands out about your gu		n particular	which	Why did you choose this ecotour? Please number in the order of importance. Recommended by friend or family
				Recommended by accommodation where I am staying
 3. The Impact of the Please rate each of the moment. 			you feel	Promotion materials looked good
I I feel I have a bet we visited.	ter understanding	of the envir	onment	Timing suited me
not at all true	somewhat true			Other (please state)
moderately true	very true	unsure		► Where are you from?
■ I feel motivated to behaviour.	o practice environn	nentally frie	endly	local Australia (non-local) overseas
not at all true	somewhat true very true	Upruro		Post code (if Australia)
moderately true	0.15.11	unsure		(os. osas (n namas)
My curiosity is aro				Country of origin (if overseas)
not at all true moderately true	somewhat true very true	unsure		
4. About You	A 22 4 A 25 E 25	-1,7-21		Who are you travelling with? (partner, friend, children etc.)
On this ecotour, ho following motives?	w important to you	were each	n of the	
Please rate each o between 1 to 5, 1 b	of the following by o	portant to r		In which category is your age?
5 being "extremely	important to me".			<18 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+
Not at To have a high letexperience	all Extremel extremel of involvement	mely import with the na		► Are you? male ☐ female ☐
1	2 3	4	5	► What is your highest level of education completed?
The second secon	have an experienc	ce I could n	iot on	high school or less
my own	2 3	Ā	5	some post-secondary
		-		certificate or diploma
■ To spend time wit	h family and/or frie	inds		
1	2 3	4	5	university degree
■ To have a guide o	during the tour			postgraduate degree
ì	2 3	4	5	other
■ To be with people				► Are you now:
1	2 3	4	5	employed
To learn somethin	g new			retired
	2 3	4	5	unemployed
1 To be physically o	hallenged			full-time student
j.	2 3	4	5	other
1 To have a holiday	that is organised f	or me		
1	2 3	4	5	
I To do an ecotour	that was environm adversely affect ti		ment	
1	2 3	4	5	

Client feedback may involve a written or verbal survey. A note of caution: while it is relatively straightforward to provide feedback forms to clients, it is far trickier to analyse the results and present them in a clear and meaningful manner. Analysis can also take quite a bit of time. An alternative to hiring a consultant to conduct the survey for you is to work with a local academic institution which may be able to access research grants for the purpose or provide tertiary student assessment.

The example of a client feedback form in Table 15 is largely based on the results of a national report funded by the Commonwealth Government through the Australian National Training Authority and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research in cooperation with the Ecotourism Association of Australia.

USING FEEDBACK TO ADVANTAGE

Collecting feedback is valuable when it is analysed and used to improve or enhance your ecotour product.

Altering your ecotour may be as straightforward as allowing slightly more time for a toilet stop or as challenging as designing in more participatory experiences. You will have to be sensitive to what aspects really warrant change.

Think of using evaluation as you would regular car maintenance - it allows you to understand and make decisions about the capabilities of your product in the longer term. While your clients may be satisfied with your ecotours at the moment, don't expect that their feedback will be the same in two, three or five years. Ecotourism is a dynamic field and one that is attracting higher and higher standards of product and service.

Gaining and using customer feedback to monitor and improve your ecotour products will also assist you if you decide to pursue tour accreditation and guide certification. The National Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP) and the Ecotour Guide Certification Program (TGCP) can provide benefits to businesses such as providing baseline criteria for operators to determine the degree to which their business practices ecotourism, the opportunity to promote themselves as a bona fide ecotourism operation and an opportunity to continually improve performance to a standard recognised as best practice.

AWARDS

Awards are another way to distinguish your ecotour products as well as boost the profile, motivation and confidence of yourself and your staff. Some ecotourism awards are listed below.



Interpretation Australia Awards for Excellence in Interpretation

These awards recognise national best practice in both face-to-face and mediabased interpretation. They are awarded annually and judged by leaders in the fields of interpretation, ecotourism, promotion, marketing and heritage management.

Contact: The Secretary, IAA PO Box 1231

Collingwood, VIC 3066

National Tourism Awards

The following three awards are administered under Tourism Council Australia. Winning entries from each State are automatically submitted for national judging. Contact the Tourism Council Australia in your relevant State for details.

Golden Guides: Recognises best practice in ecotourism guiding. Specific to Western Australia during 1999; to be expanded nationally.

Environmental Tourism: Recognises best practice ecotourism operators.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tourism: Recognises awareness of customs and culture of indigenous people as related to the tourism industry.

Pacific Asia Tourism Association Gold Awards

These awards recognise exceptional achievement in a variety of tourism endeavours. (Award entry fees in US dollars).

Green Leaf Environment Awards Category: Recognises ecotourism/travel-related project.

Heritage and Culture Awards: Recognises a culture's built or natural elements (heritage); recognises a culture's traditional or performing arts (culture).

Contact: Gold Awards Coordinator PATA Headquarters, 1 Montgomery St Suite 100, Telesis Tower San Francisco, CA 94104 USA

HE ROAD AHEAD

This guidebook was developed in part to cope with the difficulty of getting ecotour operators together for any period longer than a one day workshop on interpretation. Far more time is required to present the theory and demonstrate the practice of guided interpretation which is the substance of a sound ecotourism product. This guidebook helps fill a gap by providing a significant interpretive perspective on the business of ecotourism.

Just around the corner is the exciting development of internet and CD ROM access to similar tourism training tools as well as incorporating licensing, accreditation and certification systems.

The business of conducting ecotours will remain a dynamic one. As an ecotour guide or operator in Australia during this period of rapid growth and opportunity, you will find a large degree of change as this sector of the tourism industry matures. However, despite all the changes to come, the core skills involved in environmental and cultural interpretation will remain intact.

Knowing your audience and your subjects, developing strong themes for your communication and actively respecting and contributing to the local area and people are all part of the discipline of interpretation which in turn is vital to ecotourism. No matter where your business takes you and no matter your focus, be it whale sharks, Aboriginal bush craft, soil erosion or the impact of exotic species on the Australian landscape, being adept at interpretive design will always stand you in good stead.

The authors of this manual believe fervently that good quality interpretation has the power to reap positive environmental, cultural and social benefits and to be economically sustainable. Interpretation is a timeless skill, it is planned, meaningful communication that touches people long after departure.

Enjoy the journey.



28. The Business of Nature-based Tourism, Hospitality Press, 1998, p.201



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ABOUT WESTERN AUSTRALIA

CALM produces a suite of communication media including publications, CD ROM, and videos. Check out NatureBase http://www.calm.wa.gov.au - a one stop site to find out more about what's happening with CALM in caring for forests, wildlife, reserves, recreation and tourism in Western Australia.



Department of Conservation and Land Management Online



CALM: the Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management.

distribution: the process of making a product or service available to a customer.

- ecotour: an interpretive activity involving some travel (walk, drive, boat, ride, fly) designed to create positive, memorable and personal experiences of our natural and cultural heritage.
- ecotourism: nature-based tourism that involves interpretation and education and is managed to be ecologically sustainable and socially responsible.
- ecotour program: a series of interrelated interpretive activities linked together through some form of travel (walk, drive, boat, ride, fly).
- ecotourism product: a broad reference to tourism services offered to the market and designed to be ecologically sustainable including half day ecotour programs, package holidays, a restaurant meal, eco-lodge facilities and services and so on.
- familiarisation: ('famil') a session or workshop in which tour operators and agents are presented with information about the experiences of local tour operators' products.
- focus group: a group of clients and potential clients brought together to brainstorm ideas on tour opportunities.
- heritage: the things we value and want to keep as a community and a culture. The concept of heritage can be applied to the natural and cultural environment. It includes built components as well as the value we put on land and seascapes.
- **Inbound Tour Operators (ITOs)**: businesses and agents which promote and sell Australian travel packages to buyers outside Australia.
- interpretation: a means of communicating ideas and feelings that enrich people's understanding and appreciation of their world and their role within it.
- interpretation program: a series of interrelated interpretive activities, but not usually requiring participation in each activity or travel.
- interpretive activity: an activity designed to create positive, memorable and personal experiences of our natural and cultural heritage.

marketing: refers to i) researching your market to identify your potential customers and determine what sort of experiences they want; and ii) reaching your potential customers through a strategy of promotion to ensure they know about your product.

market mix: your actual client groups from within the broader marketplace.

market niche: your preferred client groups within the broad marketplace.

PLI: public liability insurance.

price: the monetary value agreed upon for a service or product by provider and purchaser.

promotion: the process of developing and distributing persuasive communication about a product.

retail agent: retail travel agents and other outlets that sell travel products like ecotours directly to the public.

tour guide/ecotour guide: the tour leader who provides the interpretive link between the resource and the tourist. The tour guide is the catalyst in enriching visitor experiences. The tour guide brings together time and place, sites and exhibits, people and stories to reveal meanings not immediately apparent to the casual observer.

tour operation: a business that supplies for profit products for tourists involving transport, information, instruction or supervision of activities.

tourism: any activity involving moving people to places away from where they normally live and work, and their activities during their visit.

Peter O'Reilly, President, Ecotourism Association Australia

"The strongest focus of this book is the ecotourism product and how to develop it into very personal natural experiences. Absolutely crucial to this is the interpretation of the natural and cultural values presented within an ecotour. Despite its importance, the concept of interpretation is often misunderstood to the detriment of both the business and its clients. For many years CALM has exhibited leadership and expertise in interpretation and thus there would be few more qualified to guide the newcomer through the development of interpretive programs.

I strongly recommend this book to anyone starting business in the ecotourism industry, and would also advise you to strongly consider the National Ecotourism Accreditation Program. Together these documents can provide a most auspicious

beginning to any budding ecotourism venture."

Rachel Faggetter, National President, Interpretation Australia Association

"Interpretation enriches our experience and understanding of nature. We know how much it adds value to the ecotourist experience, and can lead to passionate, lifelong commitment to conservation. But we also know that it must be planned with knowledge, care and imagination. This guidebook offers an excellent introduction to the field, and is crammed with practical advice about planning wonderful experiences to match the needs and interests of your visitors, while adding to their knowledge and enjoyment. I welcome the guidebook and applaud its initiative."

Ian G. Menzies, Australian Wilderness Expeditions

"Numerous books have been written by academics about ecotourism, but none by a practitioner with real, hands-on experience in the design and delivery of quality interactive and educational ecotourism experiences. Gil Field and Lotte Lent, with years of practical field experiences in the art of environmental interpretation, have produced a guidebook for ecotour operators that will refine their operations and further enhance Australia's reputation as the home for some of the finest eco-experiences that the world can offer."

Steve Crawford, Nature-based Tourism, WA Tourism Commission

"More than ever before, today's tourism customers can be tagged 'the intelligent tourist'. They are really after high quality experiences and expect today's tourism operators to deliver. Developing Ecotours and Other Interpretive Activity Programs, I believe, will provide both existing tourism operators and those new to the industry with many insights on the road to becoming an 'intelligent operator'."

Ross Dowling, Assoc Professor of Tourism, Edith Cowan University

"I commend this book as an essential guide to all involved in the development of ecotourism. Theoretically sound and practically based, the authors and various contributors have compiled a state-of-the-art, innovative workbook which will help practitioners prepare and deliver first-class ecotourism experiences. Such experiences will help us all lead more meaningful lives as we begin to learn about and interact with our natural and cultural environment."

Dr. Betty Weller, Associate Professor of Tourism, Monash University

"I am enthusiastic about the work that the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) is doing, particularly in the areas of standards and best practice guiding and interpretation. Some of the writing that Gil Field is doing, such as Best Recipes for Interpreting our Heritage and Developing Ecotours and Other Interpretive Activity Programs, is cutting edge material that is putting CALM at the forefront of ecotour guiding, not just in Australia but internationally."

YOUR FEEDBACK information, please complete this survey.

We need your help! Your responses will enable us to monitor and Improve our interpretive services. Once you have reviewed this manual and applied some of the



Return completed form to:

Visitor Interpretation Services Department of Conservation, Western Australia Locked Bag 104 Bentley Delivery Centre, WA 6983 Fax 08 9334 0583



(Tick all that apply) Ecotour guide Ecotour operator Tourism organisation (government) Tourism agency (non-government) Ecotourism consultant Ecotourism training provider Other (Please specify) How useful did you find this guidebook, on a scale of 1 to 5? (Please circle)	
(Tick all that apply) Ecotour guide Ecotour operator Tourism organisation (government) Tourism agency (non-government) Ecotourism consultant Ecotourism training provider Other (Please specify) 2. How useful did you find this guidebook, on a scale of 1 to 5? (Please circle) 1 2 3 4 5 3. List three features which you found particularly useful? 4. List three features that could be improved and how you think they could be	
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"...The strongest focus of this book is the ecotourism product and how to develop it into very personal natural experiences.
...I strongly recommend this book to anyone starting business in the ecotourism industry."

Peter O'Reilly, President, Ecotourism Association Australia

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